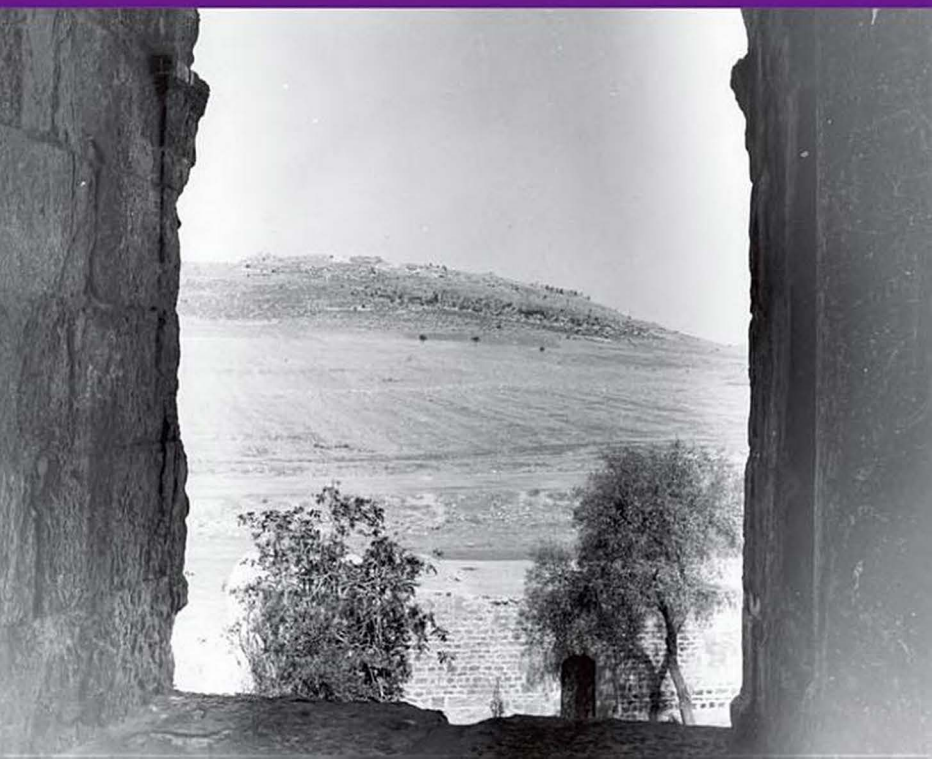


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# 'We have no king but Christ'

Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria  
on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585)

PHILIP WOOD



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PW



# Contents

<i>Notes</i>	x
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>Map: The Levant and Iraq c.500</i>	xii
Introduction	1
Part I:	
A Roman Paideia	2
The Fifth Century	5
Part II:	
Edessa and her Neighbours	7
Cultures and Ethnies	12
Part III: Summary of Argument	
Cultural Independence in Syria and Edessa	16
The Sixth Century: Syria, Mesopotamia and the Miaphysite Movement	18
1. Classification in a Christian Empire	21
Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Ecclesiastical Historians	21
Improvement and the Christian Empire	28
2. Controlling the Barbarians. The First Syrian Hagiographic Collection	38
Part I:	
Self-control and Philosophy amongst the Barbarians	39
The Founders of Syrian Asceticism	44
Part II:	
The Perceptive Hagiographer	49
A Spiritual Wild West?	52
The Messalians	56
Hagiography in Alternative Traditions: Rejection and Appropriation	59
Conclusions	64

3.	Theories of Nations and the World of Late Antiquity	67
	Ethnies in Syria: Jews and Samaritans	71
	Ethnies in Syria: Palmyra and Edessa	75
4.	Edessa and beyond. The Reception of the <i>Doctrina Addai</i> in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries	82
	Part I:	
	The Abgar Legend	83
	A Religious Paradigm in the <i>Doctrina Addai</i>	88
	Guardians of Orthodoxy: the Apostolic Mandate of the Bnay Hire	93
	The <i>Life of Euphemia and the Goth</i> : a Different View of Fifth-Century Edessa	95
	Part II:	
	The Development of the Myth: The Protonike Legend and Anti-Jewish Polemic	101
	The <i>Acts of Mar Mari</i> and the Oriental Missions	110
	The Cities of Nimrod and the 'Land of Nod' in the <i>Cave of Treasures</i>	117
	Ascetic Practice in the <i>Cave of Treasures</i>	120
	Language and Race in the <i>Cave of Treasures</i>	121
	Conclusions: Edessene history after the Arab Conquest	124
5.	The Julian Romance	132
	Part I:	
	Summary	133
	Dating and Context	140
	Themes of the <i>Doctrina Addai</i> : the Pagans and the Jews	142
	Part II:	
	Beyond the <i>Doctrina Addai</i> : a Tapestry of Empires	150
	A Subversive Political Ideal?	157
	Conclusions	161
6.	Creating Boundaries in the Miaphysite Movement	163
	Part I:	
	The Context for Innovation: the Miaphysite Movement	164
	The Structures of Miaphysitism	173
	Part II:	
	Miaphysite Hagiography	175

The Chosen Land: Geographical Polemic in John of Ephesus	178
Ascetic Custom in Mesopotamia	183
Part III:	
Contradictions of Authority	186
Self-control and Parrhēsia: Miaphysite Kaiserkritik	191
An Empire in Disarray	198
Conclusions	208
7. A Miaphysite Commonwealth	209
Part I:	
The Miaphysite Missions	210
Part II:	
The Martyrs of Najran: Varieties of the Christian Commonwealth	215
State Actors: Caleb and Justin in Himyar	220
The Martyrs of Najran: The Earliest Reports	224
Memories of Martyrdom and Mission in John of Ephesus	226
Part III:	
Civilising the Arabs: Christianity and Diplomacy	230
Keeping the Arabs in check: Bostra and Rusafa	235
The Ghassanids: Military Opportunism and Religious Independence	239
The Phylarchs and the Church: Palestine and Sinai	245
The Phylarchs and the Church: Jafnid Patronage and Leadership	249
The Fall of Mundhir in John of Ephesus	252
Conclusions	255
Conclusions	257
<i>Abbreviations</i>	265
<i>Bibliography</i>	267
<i>Index</i>	291

## Notes

### *A Note on Places and Peoples*

I have used Roman names for cities throughout, except where I refer to the Islamic period. Thus I refer to Edessa, rather than Urhoy or Urfa.

The distinction between Syria and Mesopotamia presents a special problem. Syriac sources often use both terms to refer to a much wider area than the Roman provinces. Syria can stretch from Gaza to Edessa, while Mesopotamia (Syriac *Beth Nahryn*) can refer to the region from Armenia to the Persian Gulf, as well as the smaller region around Edessa, Nisibis, and Harran. This geographical imprecision is further complicated by ethnic terminology: Suryaye or Syrians are variously defined by family origin, language, homeland, or religion.

I retain these imprecise terms because they reflect the different ways that authors drew ethnic, linguistic, and geographical boundaries, but I will also refer to more precisely demarcated Roman provinces (e.g. Syria I and II, Osrhoene, Phoenicia Libanensis, etc.)

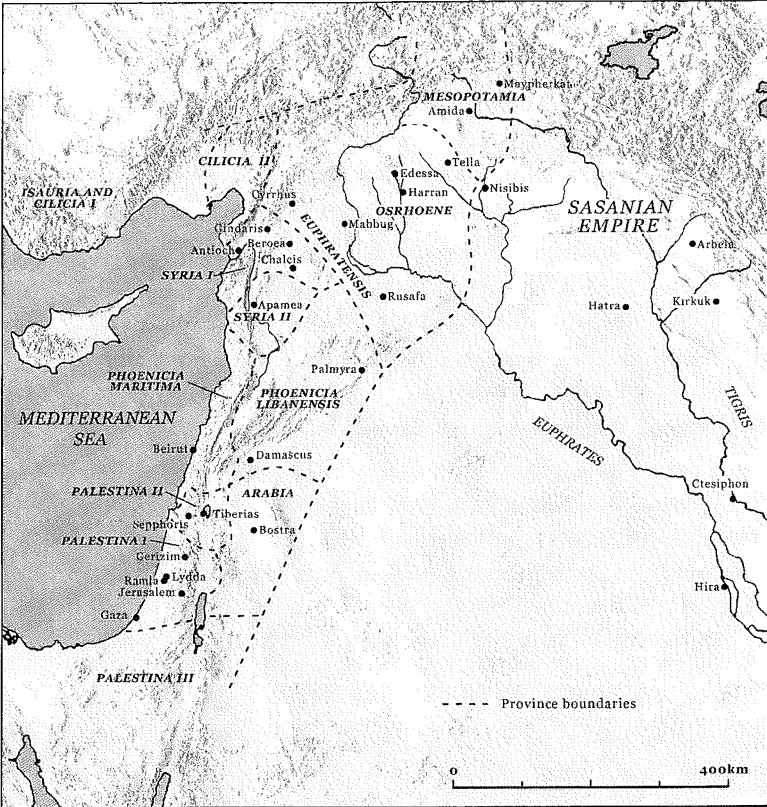
### *A Note on Translations*

My translations from Latin, Greek, and Syriac make occasional departures from published translations, but these are mostly minor.

## *List of Illustrations*

- |    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 1. | Amida. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.   | 128 |
| 2. | Edessa. Sacred carp pool. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.  | 128 |
| 3. | Edessa. The citadel. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.   | 129 |
| 4. | Hnana. The blessed earth of the saints, with a depiction of Symeon the stylite. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango. | 129 |
| 5. | Telanissos. The monastery of Symeon the stylite. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango.                                | 130 |
| 6. | Cyrrhus. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango.  | 131 |





Map: The Levant and Iraq, c. 500.

## Introduction

In the year 502 the Persian shah Kavad laid siege to the city of Edessa on the Mesopotamian frontier of the Roman empire. A local chronicler, writing in Syriac and known by the name of Joshua the Stylite, reports that Kavad was defied by the Roman general Areobindus. The general told the shah: 'You have seen that this city belongs neither to you, nor to Anastasius [the Roman emperor], but to Christ, who has blessed it'. In this environment of conflict between two great powers, this Edessene chronicle proclaimed the cultural independence of his city, which he connects to the legendary promise made by Christ to her pre-Roman king, Abgar the Black.<sup>1</sup>

This book will investigate the development of this cultural independence as one of the long-term consequences of the Christianisation of the Roman world. It will examine Christianisation both from the perspective of the Roman 'state', in terms of attempts to use and subvert local religious tradition, and from a local perspective, as part of a claim to cultural independence in a world dominated by a single political system. Secondly, this book will turn to the consequences of this cultural independence for political ideas. I argue that the hagiographic writing of sixth-century Syria and Mesopotamia, drew on an earlier cultural independence to challenge the actions of the emperor. The Christological crises produced a theological rupture and persecution that prompted a more direct *Kaiserkritik*, a political thought that held up the actions of Christian rulers against an idealised template.

However, before we can investigate the appearance of this cultural independence, we must first set it in two different contexts. The first

<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 60–1).

of these is the broad intellectual and political context: the Roman empire of the second and third centuries and the apparatus it employed to exclude or normalise the ‘barbarian’ world around it, the *paideia*. The second is Edessa’s specific geographical, political and economic position within this world, the specific context for the emergence of Syriac as a Christian language and Edessa’s own foundation myths.

## PART I

### A Roman *Paideia*

The Roman empire of the second and third century halted the relentless expansion that had characterised its earlier history. In a gesture of his philhellenic sensibilities, the emperor Hadrian poured the resources of the empire into the decoration of Athens and the sponsorship of athletic games and of Greek literary works. The emperor’s gesture was more than just an appreciation of Hellenic culture. It was also an appropriation. The inscription on the emperor’s triumphal arch in Athens reads: ‘It was not Theseus who built Athens but Hadrian.’<sup>2</sup>

The symbiosis of Greek and Roman culture was accompanied by an underlying competition to control the history of both Greeks and Romans, in which cultural credentials were used to jockey for prestige, the so-called Second Sophistic. But even if emperors sought to control the history of the Greek *poleis* for themselves, Greek literature and culture were still used and shared across the whole empire.<sup>3</sup> Mastery of this shared Greco-Roman high culture was an indication of suitable status for political activity and demonstrated access to the

<sup>2</sup> See C. Kelly, *Very Short Introduction to the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2006), 61–77, esp. 76.

<sup>3</sup> S. Swain, ‘Sophists and emperors: the case of Libanius’, in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 355–400, at 362–73 examines the continuation of the values of *paideia* from Aelius Aristides to Libanius in the 360s.

commonplaces and assumptions of the ruling classes, the education in a canon of classical texts referred to as *paideia*.

This *paideia* was not just a demonstration of conspicuous consumption, it was also a means of conditioning the expanding ruling class of the empire to continue to collaborate with the imperial project and to exclude those who did not belong. Education was ‘the means through which souls proceed to excellence and a condition proper to humanity’ and educators were, like soldiers and judges, defenders of what was proper, ‘of the lines between what was thinkable and unthinkable.’<sup>4</sup> *Paideia* was, in the terms of Pierre Bourdieu, a generative habitus, that set out the valid norms of behaviour, through which the status quo might be reproduced.<sup>5</sup> Thus the educational system of Rome’s elites produced a set of shared forms for expression across all the provinces of the empire, which allowed the elites of conquered provinces to Romanise themselves: to learn the language and behaviour of a transprovincial elite and, in competition with their neighbours, to set up the institutions that would in turn teach *paideia*.<sup>6</sup>

But if *paideia* was a package for inclusion into an imperial elite, then it also included a series of stereotypes, drawn originally from Classical Greece, which excluded those who did not fit in. Thinkers in Athens in the fifth century BC had developed philosophies about the natural slavery of barbarians, and of their effeminacy and unsuitability for government, theories that built on earlier assumptions about the stupidity of those who could not speak Greek.<sup>7</sup> These theories were accompanied by Lamarckian notions of the effects of climate upon civilisation, meaning that the peoples furthest from Greece, the steppe nomads, were least suited to government,

<sup>4</sup> R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language, the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1988), 13–15.

<sup>5</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977), 23; C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2000), 23–5.

<sup>6</sup> P. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2005), 36–9 and 117, discussing the evidence of the second-century *Lex Irnitana*.

<sup>7</sup> P. Cartledge, *The Greeks: a Portrait of Self and Others* (2nd edn., Oxford, 2002), 53–7; R. Schlaifer, ‘Greek theories of slavery from Homer to Aristotle’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 47 (1936), 165–204. The most important theory of natural slavery is Aristotle’s in *Politics*, Book 1.

subsisting on raw meat and living outside civilisation, a stereotype that lasted long into antiquity.<sup>8</sup>

The Roman empire would continue to employ similar stereotypes to differentiate itself from the 'uncivilised world' around it and from many of the ethnic groups that it ruled. But, unlike the Hellenic writers, there was a sense that the empire could reshape and improve its environment, that it had a mandate for rule and expansion as a result of its civilising mission, which provided law and peace to the whole world.<sup>9</sup> In Roman hands, these stereotypes had to be more flexible since they had to allow for the improvement of provincials, as we see in Plutarch's vision of Alexander's civilising mission or Lucian of Samosata's vision of himself as a barbarian transformed by *paideia*.<sup>10</sup>

This image of the Roman empire in the second century only allowed a small group with the power to engage in politics and engage in civic patronage. This same group of elites was defined by *paideia*, and, even when criticising other elites or the emperor himself, the group was bound together by this set of shared references and values. As Geertz puts it, 'individuals, even if divided, read from a shared script of shared symbolic forms'.<sup>11</sup> Beyond this group, the inhabitants of different provinces, even after the universal grant of citizenship, were divided by religion, language, and culture. But there was no alternative set of cultural values to rival *paideia*: if Hadrian had told the Athenians that he had built their city, and thereby appropriated their history, he intended to destroy the history of the Jews when he turned Jerusalem into the Roman *colonia* of Aelia Capitolina and expelled them from their symbolic centre.<sup>12</sup> For the

<sup>8</sup> F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley, 1988); R. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: the Ethnographic Tradition* (Cambridge, 1982), 1–15.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Dauge, *Le barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et la civilisation* (Bruxelles, 1981), 33; C. Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers: the Dynamics of Empire* (London, 2004), 144–6.

<sup>10</sup> M. Maas, 'Delivered from their ancient customs: Christianity and the question of cultural change in early Byzantine ethnography', in A. Grafton and K. Mills (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester NY, 2003), 152–88, at 159.

<sup>11</sup> C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 124.

<sup>12</sup> F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31BC–337AD* (Cambridge Mass., 1993), 106–7 and 348–9.

majority of the empire's citizens, it is the participation in the Roman army, access to the Roman law, and, to lesser extents, the imperial cult and the use of Latin and Greek, which defined membership of the Roman empire.

## The Fifth Century

The gradual Christianisation of the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries changed this situation. If *paideia* was still prized as a display of knowledge, it was not the only means of involvement in the empire. Peter Brown's *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* has emphasised the increasing importance of bishops in high politics, as they took over the roles of the curial classes, engaged in diplomacy on behalf of their cities and drew support from the urban poor through their role as the distributors of the church's charity.<sup>13</sup> There are several corollaries to Brown's argument. The urban mob was, to a degree, enfranchised by this symbiosis with episcopal power: its potential to influence the behaviour of urban elites by acclamation, which had existed in antiquity, was now strengthened by a particular spokesman. Simultaneously, the definition of the empire as a Christian empire meant that all Roman citizens ought to be orthodox Christians: any congregation might support clerics or holy men to articulate their desires on a wider arena.

Much of the historiography of the Roman empire has tended to emphasise the centripetal effects of Christianisation upon the identities of Roman citizens.<sup>14</sup> The ecclesiastical historians of the fifth century, whom I will investigate briefly in Chapter 1, equated the self-control of civilised pagan Romans with the Nicene orthodoxy of the Theodosian dynasty and attributed the piety of the ascetic holy men

<sup>13</sup> P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley, 2005), 275–9 on bishops as model citizens as well as model Christians; W. Liebeschütz, *Barbarians and Bishops. Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford, 1991), 250–1 on the contribution of Christianity to imperial 'solidarity'; G. Greatrex, 'Roman identity in the sixth century', in Greatrex and Mitchell, (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London 2000), 267–92 on the contribution of orthodoxy to Roman identity.

of the past to contemporary emperors. And, unlike earlier emperors, the orthodoxy that they demonstrated when God answered their prayers was applicable to the whole empire and the spread of their universal religion became equated with the extension of Roman power. These histories simultaneously differentiated the Theodosian dynasty from its Arian predecessors and stressed the need for contemporary Romans to remain loyal to the creed of Nicaea for their empire to prosper against barbarians and heretics. Heresiology was increasingly used alongside long-standing stereotypes about barbarians to demarcate the Roman, orthodox world, a process Maas has called 'the barometer of Christian identification with imperial authority'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus a much larger proportion of the empire's subjects were now being monitored, in terms of their orthodoxy and right practice. But these subjects had also become political participants, because of the increased role of the populace in providing an orthodox mandate. This process also differentiated Jews and Samaritans, who were increasingly politically isolated but also more clearly defined groups in a Christian empire.

However, the effects of Christianisation were not limited to the extension of the boundaries of the Roman world to exclude heretics and barbarians. The self-presentation of the Roman state that is reflected in the ecclesiastical histories cannot be assumed to be a dominant discourse.<sup>16</sup> Even in these, historians used their praise of the emperors to constrain their future actions, such as Socrates' assertions that the rigorist Novatian sect (with which he sympathised) were also Nicenes who had opposed the Arians, and should therefore be tolerated in the Nicene empire. Moreover, as Hobsbawm has suggested, identities co-exist to be triggered in different situations.<sup>17</sup> Being Roman and being Christian were both supra-ethnic identities that could be blurred together or separated by political thinkers, or through legislation.

<sup>15</sup> Maas, 'Cultural change', 153.

<sup>16</sup> Dauge, *Barbare*, 22–3 suggests this when he calls the Roman classification of the barbarian 'a fundamental synergy between the human and the divine to order the universe'. This underestimates the attempts of 'barbarians' to 'talk back', especially in a Christian empire.

<sup>17</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1700: Programme, Myth and Reality* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1992), 8.

But the efforts of certain elites to equate a certain form of Christianity with certain ways of being Roman as the sole orthodox, legitimate way the empire should be run, should not blind us to the reversal of this process, in which heterodox or heteropract Christianities refused to obey the models set out for them, or when Christian cities wrote themselves new histories structured around their religion, that differentiated themselves from the contemporary Roman empire.

Thus when Averil Cameron writes of a 'totalising discourse' in which Christian texts and styles annexed and converted every available literary niche, we need to nuance her statement carefully.<sup>18</sup> The fourth to sixth century clearly did see an expansion in the production of Christian texts, but this was far from homogenous in its effects. Some traditions, especially heresiology and ecclesiastical history, represent the attempts of the state and of powerful bishops to demarcate the boundaries of the state and of proper religion, to classify and to judge both Romans and non-Romans (though even here, groups of elites might strongly disagree, as we see in the rivalries between Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch). But elsewhere the discourse was thoroughly fragmented, as clerics advocated personal heresies or preserved the anti-imperial stance of the third century in their hagiography, such as when Antony criticises Constantine as 'a mere man' in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*.<sup>19</sup>

## PART II

### Edessa and her Neighbours

Perhaps one of the best examples of this fragmented discourse is the profusion of Christian writing in languages other than Greek and Latin: in Syriac, Georgian, Armenian, and Coptic. In part this reflects the early history of Christianity: the religion had developed in the

<sup>18</sup> Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: the Development of a Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, 1991), 113–15.

<sup>19</sup> *Life of Antony*, 81 (ed. Bartelink, 342).



Roman world but opposed to it, and the Roman empire adopted a movement that already had numerous scriptural languages; independent histories of proselytism and martyrdom and a spectrum of doctrinal ideas. It is this aspect of the religion adopted by Constantine that I wish to stress especially here: for all that Christianisation does represent an extension of the powers of Roman elites to mould the definition of orthodox behaviour, some traditions were beyond their reach, and would form the basis for inventions of history and for ideas of cultural independence that were maintained while still being 'Roman'.<sup>20</sup>

The focus of this work will be on the emergence of cultural independence in a region where one of these 'barbarian' languages, Syriac, achieved significance. My geographical parameters therefore, not only concentrate on the scribal and intellectual centre of the Syriac language in Edessa and Mesopotamia, but also include the broader zones to the south and west of the Euphrates, as well as Sasanian-controlled lands east of the Tigris, to which it spread. This geographical breadth will allow us to investigate the genesis of Edessene inventions of history as well as its reception in other Aramaic-speaking territories where Syriac achieved a status as a prestige language, sometimes rivalling Greek.

Edessa itself was situated in Mesopotamia, a small fortified city that was one of a number of client kingdoms absorbed by the Roman empire only in the third century. Like the cities of Hatra, Harran, and Palmyra it possessed a pantheon of local pagan gods, a royal house, and an aristocracy that claimed local origins, as well as an indigenous Jewish population.<sup>21</sup> However, unlike the others, it was the only city of the borderlands between Rome and Persia that retained prosperity and security into the fourth century. As an important settlement near the frontier it was fortified against Persian attack and received Christian refugees from Nisibis after that city fell to the Persians in 363.

<sup>20</sup> P. Peeters, *Les trésors orientaux de l'hagiographie Byzantine* (Bruxelles, 1950) prepared the ground for such investigations, with his introduction to the hagiographic connections between Greek and oriental languages.

<sup>21</sup> For Edessa's cultic connections see H. J.-W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980).

Additionally, Edessa derived prosperity from trade. The city was positioned very near the sole legitimate trade route between the Romans and Persians, which ran through Nisibis, and this was supported by a network of roads and inns, the logistic support that made trade possible.<sup>22</sup> The city's specialisation is recognised in its Christian foundation history, the *Doctrina Addai*, which remarks that its supposed author, the scribe Labubna, placed it in the archives, 'among the laws of the kings and the contracts of the merchants'.<sup>23</sup>

Mesopotamia's position on the frontier with Persia meant that it received large external stimuli in the form of imperial funding for fortification, as well as water supplies which had secondary functions beyond the purely military. This external threat even prompted the creation of fortified cities, of which Amida and Constantina (Tella), under Constantius II, and Dara, under Anastasius, are the most famous.<sup>24</sup> Amida in particular acquired fame as a monastic centre, and it is celebrated for this in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints*.

However, in spite of this external sponsorship of other sites, Edessa retained its importance as a centre for manuscript production into the Islamic period, a cultural importance that is also reflected in Edessa's prominence in the early parts of all historical writing in Western Syriac.<sup>25</sup> Above all Edessa was seen, probably accurately, as the origin-point of Syriac in regions where other, less prestigious dialects of Aramaic were spoken.<sup>26</sup>

To the south and west of the Euphrates, Aramaic was also spoken. But this was a region where formal Roman government had been in place since the first century, and where the mark of Seleucid rule may also have been stronger, with the deliberate renaming of a great part of Syria I and II after Macedonian cities. This zone to the south of Edessa can be divided in two. The maritime region, consisting of the province of Phoenicia Libanensis and the coast of the Syrian provinces, with their great cities of Antioch and Beirut, drew their

<sup>22</sup> See the *Life of Dometios* (ed. Van den Gheyne, 295–301).

<sup>23</sup> *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 53).

<sup>24</sup> *Chronicle to 819* (ed. Chabot, 3–4); Procopius, *Buildings*, 2. 1., 4–10.

<sup>25</sup> Note its prominence in the early sections of the *Chronicle to 819* and the *Chronicle of Jacob of Edessa*.

<sup>26</sup> Brock and Taylor, *Hidden Pearl*, 2. 244–5.

prosperity and significance not only from trade, but also from their longstanding importance as educational centres for the whole Roman world (especially in law and rhetoric).<sup>27</sup>

Further to the east, and dependent on the port cities at this time for their trade in wine and olive oil, was inland Syria.<sup>28</sup> This region was studded with cities (re-)founded in the wake of Alexander's conquests: Chalcis, Beroea, Zeugma, Cyrrhus.<sup>29</sup> And Greek was used in an urban context as a language of administration for 'church and state'.<sup>30</sup> Yet, as Theodoret of Cyrrhus' fifth-century *Historia Religiosa* demonstrates, the countryside, in the provinces of Euphratensis and rural Syria I and II, contained speakers of both Aramaic and Arabic. This rural territory also contained the varied religious practice that would attract both criticism and praise from its bishop, in his careful winnowing of suitable religious exemplars for the monasticism of his own day.

Palestine, even further to the south, lies mostly beyond the remit of this study, save as a comparison for how religious and cultural difference might be accommodated in the Christian Roman empire, in the case of the Jews and Samaritans. However, the Arab phylarchates that were established on the fringes of Palestine in the sixth century, as part of a reaction against Persian aggression, will provide an excursus in the final chapter.

Sasanian Mesopotamia, to the east of Edessa, will also be treated briefly. As an Aramaic-speaking region that received the missionaries and Christian myths of Edessa, it provides an important example of how Christianisation generated new ideas of history and self-awareness beyond the orthodoxies of the Roman world. On the other hand, the later missions of the Church of the East (the 'Nestorians'), into Central Asia, India, and the Persian Gulf, lie beyond this study.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> P. Collinet, *L'école de droit à Beirut* (Paris, 1925); R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006), 770–2.

<sup>29</sup> A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City: From Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford, 1940), 9.

<sup>30</sup> F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> See in general, C. Baumer, *The Church of the East. An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (New York, 2006). I intend to examine the development of the catholicosate and Christianity in the Sasanian world in later work on the *Chronicle of Seert*.

Most of the urban centres of the regions of the Roman empire that I will examine had been participants in the historical inventions that accompanied the Greco-Roman *paideia*. This was done chiefly by describing their foundation by the gods or heroes of pagan myth, or by connecting themselves to the real, but dimly remembered, protagonists of distant history. Thus numerous cities in Syria and Anatolia imagined that they had been founded by Athens or Sparta; Phrygia emphasised its mythic connection to Midas; Miletus to the hero Sarpedon, and Sidon to Cadmus.<sup>32</sup> This pagan historical invention continued into the fifth-century, with the stories of the foundation of Beirut by the goddess Tyche.<sup>33</sup> This process allowed cities to jostle for prestige with their neighbours or provide excuses for old rivalries while validating their actions in terms of the *paideia* and its shared history.

Yet, strikingly, the developing importance of Christianity as an imperial religion also brought with it the near complete extinction of these foundational histories. A new emphasis on local saints' cults and their relics did allow cities to emphasise their prestige in the terms of the new religion.<sup>34</sup> But this process was disconnected from the political past of the city and its foundation (real or imagined).

Only two exceptions to this stand out in the Christian Roman world. The first is the memory of Constantine and his successors, who were celebrated as the founder, not only of Constantinople, but also of other cities (such as Martyropolis/Maypherkat, Amida, and Constantina).<sup>35</sup> Even this foundation history is the memory of a refoundation, the jettisoning of an unwanted past in favour of an improved past in the relatively recent era of Constantine. The second example, unique in the Roman East, is Edessa's *Doctrina Addai*, in which its pagan past was Christianised, but still presented the memory of an independent city, where Edessa's rulers met with an apostle.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, *Greek City*, 48–50; S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods* (Oxford, 1993), I, 204–8; Kaster, *Guardians*, 4–5 on Anazarbus and its rivalry with Tarsus.

<sup>33</sup> P. Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques, recherches sur l'oeuvre de Nonos de Panopolis* (Clermont, 1991), 176–82.

<sup>34</sup> See, in general, P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in the Latin West* (Chicago, 1981); id., 'A Dark Age crisis: aspects of the Iconoclastic controversy', *English Historical Review* 88 (1973), 1–34.

<sup>35</sup> *Chronicle to 819* (ed. Chabot, 3).

## Cultures and Ethnies

Edessa, then, was unusual in its ability to vindicate its pre-Christian past as a Christian history. This invented history formed the basis for its fifth-century cultural independence. And it was out of this sense of difference, in language, religious practice, and history, that later authors would assert the existence of Syriac-speakers as a distinct people, the Suryaye, and a history of local orthodoxy that underpinned criticism of the emperor.

In order to understand this transformation, of the accretion and association of ways of being different within the Roman world, I have found it useful to turn to writers on modern nationalism, who have faced similar questions. I do not seek to enter their debates directly, but the era of nationalism provides numerous models for the invention of nations, as a unifying dominant form of identity over and above ethnicity, class, religion, or dwelling place, but still drawing upon them. It is in this process of invention, by which different identities are clustered into a single more complex identity, that I think we can draw a parallel between eras of national formation in the modern period and the centrifugal effects of Christianisation in the late antique Roman empire.<sup>36</sup>

Two of these theorists, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, have seen the existence of ‘nations’, that is ‘communities of language, territory, economic life and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture’<sup>37</sup> as products of nationalism, and the invented histories that tie together the ‘raw materials’ of language, customs and territory.<sup>38</sup> They conceive of this as a distinctively modern process,

<sup>36</sup> I have not made use of the excellent work of the so-called Vienna school on ethnogenesis in the Western empire. Their examples correspond primarily to *militarised* group formation, and are more suited to the Armenians and Goths than to more urbanised groups such as the Jews and Suryaye, among whom, I believe, social and educational institutions played a greater role.

<sup>37</sup> Stalin’s definition, cited in Hobsbawm, *Nations* 5 n. 11.

<sup>38</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), 1–7 and 98–100. A. D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations* (Cambridge, 2004), 64–9 summarises his position. Estonia provides the flagship example for the development of this historical invention *ex nihilo*.

though Hobsbawm allows for 'elite proto-nationalism' that preceded the mass movements that followed the French Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

If we use the term 'nation' for any polity before nineteenth-century nationalism we are clearly on weaker ground than Gellner and Hobsbawm, because a theory of nationalism itself made modern thinkers formulate their own definitions. But even in a world before a shared definition of 'the nation' emerged, theories of the nation provide examples of how invented histories glued together language, customs and self-identity and produced new entities. Antony Smith, reacting against Gellner's work, has suggested that nationalism tended to involve the reworking of earlier ideas and the attribution of significance to *latent* points of difference. Smith's emphasis on the role of symbols, around which a nation or other group is gathered, allows him to conceive of nation as recurrent, continuous or rediscovered.<sup>40</sup> These symbols might be the myths, language or customs shared by a people or physical characteristics that function as recognisable signs of group membership. He terms this blend of myths and symbols in polities before mass movement 'ethnies', a term we will define more closely later.

Adrian Hastings provides two specific suggestions for the role of Christianity in this process of invention in the pre-modern period. Firstly, his evocation of the Pentecost story as a model for national difference based upon language is interesting because it is used in multiple different forms in late antiquity as a model both for a Christian empire ruling over many language groups and for the idea that each community, defined by its language, should have its own apostle.<sup>41</sup> And Sava in Serbia, Patrick in Ireland (or, for our period, Gregory in Armenia and Addai in Edessa) provide good examples of how a national dynasty and a national myth might crystallise, especially in the hands of an indigenous clergy, around such apostolic founders.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations*, 12 and 46–79.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Antiquity*, 20–1.

<sup>41</sup> Hastings, *Construction*, 14–24 and 194–5. Hastings can be criticised for his concentration on the Christian world: Thailand and Burma might also be good contenders for pre-modern 'proto-nationalism', but I cite him here for his recognition of the effects of religion in nation-building in an otherwise secular debate.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 189–90.

Secondly, Hastings also points to the importance of vernacular liturgy and the translation of the Bible in the Protestant Reformation as important initial stages for the development of nations in northern Europe. This suggestion brings out a parallel between religious revivals and reformation in Europe, America, and Africa and late antique Christianisation, especially since the eastern Roman empire employed vernacular liturgies long before Protestantism.<sup>43</sup> This idea has been developed more fully in Gorski's study of the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain. He emphasises that the Hebraic nationalism of the revolt, referring to the Dutch as 'God's people' and William I as a David, defending Leiden against the Assyrian Spaniards, which was reflected within the Dutch 'print community'.<sup>44</sup> This propaganda formed the basis for calls to exclude non-Calvinists from 'the new Israel', and inspired similar 'Hebraic moments' in Lutheran Hesse and Protestant England, creating a paradigm for the formation of multiple Protestant communities.<sup>45</sup>

Religious distinctions provided a potential boundary between groups in late antiquity, one of a number of such boundaries that was asserted through the invention of history. One of the persuasive aspects of Smith's model is that it recognises that the differences between people that, only in *some* circumstances, trigger formation of a nation or other kind of group. Importantly, it recognises that individuals who make choices based on one group's identity rather than another do not do so in other circumstances.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, individuals' identities can be passive and are triggered in certain situations.

There are two corollaries for such group formation that are important for our purposes. The first is that the leaders of a group can determine what kinds of behaviour are appropriate for a 'good Jew' or 'a good Malay'. An example of this is provided in Shamsul's

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 14–24. Also see Gellner, *Nationalism*, 76–7 and Gellner, *Nations*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> P. S. Gorski, 'The Mosaic moment: An early modernist critique of modernist theories of nationalism', *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (2000), 1428–68, at 1436–40. Here he draws on Anderson's suggestions for Latin America: B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. edn., London, 1992), 12–18 and 37–46.

<sup>45</sup> Gorski, 'Mosaic moment', 1444–57.

<sup>46</sup> R. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 22–6 on ethnic minorities in the Balkans.

writing on Malay nationalism. He points to the polemical identification of Malay characteristics by the different political parties of an independent Malaya. These factors, such as loyalty to the rajahs, Islamic practice or culture, dwelling-place, descent and language, did not only differentiate Malays from Chinese and Indian immigrants, but also set out a pattern for what made a 'good' Malay; the extent to which Malay ethnicity should be equated with Malaysian nationality, and established the criteria on which one might claim to be Malay. The process of *signification*, in which 'objects, features and processes acquire meaning', empowered those in control of political rhetoric to define the terms of being Malay and to superimpose it on previously much more fluid notions of Malayness that date back to the early modern period.<sup>47</sup>

The second consequence of group formation is that, over time, it becomes harder to switch groups or for individuals to assert alternative identities. The anthropologist Frederic Barth, suggested that ethnicity could be seen as a performance, whose rules could be set to benefit elites within that group as well to preserve the identity of the group by constructing boundaries against others, to whom its rules were alien and hard to learn. For Barth, ethnic groups are constantly being constructed by a generative process of boundary formation. These boundaries are ascribed on the basis of overt signs, such as dress, language and building styles, and of value orientations, the system by which an individual judges others and is judged.<sup>48</sup>

The formation of myths and symbols and their roles in moulding and triggering the differences between peoples that generate identity is a methodology that seems applicable to late antiquity. Smith suggests 'ethnie' as a term for a community that is not a nation, a term that combines a sense of self-definition, shared myths (especially a myth of shared descent), uniform public culture, a territory, and legal standardisation, while lacking the mass participation, nationalist ideology, and membership of an international community that he

<sup>47</sup> S. Shamsul, 'Bureaucratic management of identity in a Modern State: "Malayness" in Post-War Malaysia', in D. Gladney, *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey and the United States* (Stanford, 1998), 135–50.

<sup>48</sup> F. Barth, *Ethnic Group and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Prospect Heights, 1960), 1–18.



sees as distinctive of the 'nation'.<sup>49</sup> I will adopt Smith's definition here, except to note that, to my mind, an *ethnie* is like a nation in that it gathers numerous forms of self-definition and presents them as a single form, creating myths to merge multiple forms of self-classification.<sup>50</sup> *Ethnies*, like nations, are inventions that use already available symbolic material. It is this process that we can observe in the texts surrounding the *Doctrina Addai* in fifth-century Mesopotamia, where different texts, focused on different locations and strata of society, argue for shared language, kinship, territory, doctrinal beliefs, and ascetic practices that bind together an Edessene or Suryaya *ethnie*.

### PART III: SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

#### Cultural Independence in Syria and Edessa

The first half of this book considers the existence of distinctive religious practice and language in Syria and the use of these by different kinds of elite writers. Chapter 1 sets out the centripetal tendencies of the Christianisation of the empire, with its emphasis on the self-control of the Nicene emperors. It is this focus on the victory of Nicaea and the opposition to the Arians that guaranteed the importance of oriental Christian groups whose members had opposed the Arians, in a political model that justified the rule of a Nicene emperor. In fourth-century Christianity, the impeccable credentials of individuals such as Jacob of Nisibis and Ephraem as Nicenes made them fathers of the church, and any interventions in the way Christianity was followed in Syria would have to negotiate with their legacy. Because Syriac had become a widespread missionary language, closely associated with Christianity, and because major proponents of Nicaea had written in Syriac meant that the language escaped the fate of the languages of Anatolia, where Christianisation accelerated Hellenisation.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Antiquity*, 15–8.

<sup>50</sup> See also R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London, 1999), 5.

<sup>51</sup> F. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianisation, c.370–529* (Leiden, 1994), 2.

Chapter 2 examines how the prestigious but distinct religious traditions associated with these Syriac-speaking fathers of the church were treated in a fifth-century hagiographic collection, Theodoret of Cyrillus' *Historia Religiosa*. In it, Theodoret accepts the orthodox reputations of Nicene figures of the past from near Edessa and Nisibis while removing their more flamboyant ascetical behaviour. These figures are important as monastic founders for the provinces of Euphratensis and Syria I and II, but he is careful to shift his hagiography away from more suspicious ascetics who were accused of heresy and away from Mesopotamia to the north. By removing some ascetics, and subverting the reputations of others, Theodoret's collection shows us both how important these 'barbarian' saints had become, as well as the techniques a hagiographer could employ to transform their reputations and make them acceptable exemplars for his readers.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate the different situation taken further north, in Edessa and Mesopotamia. At the same time that Theodoret was subverting the reputations of some Mesopotamian ascetics, a mythical foundation history of the city of Edessa was being compiled by a scribe working for native aristocrats, the *Doctrina Addai*. It describes how Abgar, an early king of Edessa, corresponded with Jesus and how he welcomed the missionary Addai to the city, who set down the ideals of orthodox Christianity and established these aristocrats, the *bnay hire*, as their guardians. This legend indicates a kind of cultural independence that was fuelled by Christianity. The increased status of Syriac in the Christian era, as the language through which much of the Aramaic-speaking had been proselytised, and the records of the third-century kings of Edessa, provided the background for the invention of history that we see in the *Doctrina Addai*. Here I consider the role of Edessene cultural independence *within* the Roman empire, and how Christianisation prompted inventions of history and assertions of prestige at a level below the doctrinal squabbles and accusations of heresy that divided Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople.

Importantly, I do not intend to use these legends to investigate the pasts they purport to describe, a period between the first and third centuries, but instead to ask what they tell us about the societies that created them in the fifth and sixth centuries. While Syriac produced no formal political philosophy in the mould of an Aristotle or a Cicero,

I argue that these myths do represent a certain kind of political thought, by which Edessa, and later other places in Mesopotamia, distinguished themselves from the Roman empire and, by the sixth century, placed conditions on imperial rule that established certain rights of resistance.

### The Sixth Century: Syria, Mesopotamia and the Miaphysite Movement

The second part of the book considers how these foundation myths and this fifth century cultural independence evolved further in the sixth century, when many, though not all, of the sees of the Roman provinces of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Osrhoene subscribed to the Miaphysite formula during the Christological controversies. (Here I use the term Miaphysite to describe the non-Chalcedonian churches in communion with Severus in preference to Monophysite, a polemical and inaccurate term found in the older literature.)<sup>52</sup>

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the connections that existed between Miaphysite writers in Syriac and the foundation myths that had been written in Edessa in the fifth century. This connection is a major omission of Segal's *Edessa: the Blessed City*, in which his concentration on periods when the city was politically independent obscures its importance within the Roman empire.<sup>53</sup>

I concentrate on this connection in Chapter 5, *The Julian Romance*, when I examine an anonymous sixth century mythical history that describes the emperor Justinian in terms of the pagan emperor Julian and the Chalcedonians in terms of the Jews. The older boundaries of Christian Edessa, by which it had declared itself one of the great cities of the Christian empire, were now turned against the emperor and his Christology: cultural independence was now played out on a broader tapestry of the whole empire, when the city's Christian past was favourably compared to the support for paganism and Judaism in Constantinople and Antioch, which were seen as forerunners of later Chalcedonianism. If sixth-century Constantinople was meant to be

<sup>52</sup> This will be discussed in Dave Michelson's contribution to the *Oxford Handbook for Late Antiquity*.

<sup>53</sup> J. B. Segal, *Edessa: the Blessed City* (Oxford, 1970).

'the epitome of earthly power and the model of the divine' by its creators, then this Edessene author clearly thought that his city, given to Christ by Constantine, was superior.<sup>54</sup>

I continue this investigation of the continuities between fifth-century cultural independence and the displacement of imperial authority in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. These lives continue the polemic of the *Julian Romance* in a more open manner. The Miaphysites are seen as the inheritors of an ascetic history that stretches back to the martyrs of the third century and the polemical language that had been used to criticise the Arians in the fifth-century church histories is turned against the Chalcedonian emperor Justinian. John also stresses the continuity of 'indigenous' Mesopotamian practices because it is a constituent part of his construction of a distinctive territory, 'the East', centred on Amida and Edessa.

However, an appeal to John's use of a timeless Syriac spirituality is out of place here.<sup>55</sup> John is not another exemplar of a changeless Syriac Christianity. Instead, he is selective in his examples of asceticism and is wary of the criticism extreme asceticism could attract. John's assertions of continuity with ancient orthodoxy proclaim both the distinctiveness of his territory and its 'natural' inclination towards Miaphysitism as an eternal orthodoxy that was used to fight the better-funded Chalcedonians. By emphasising the money of the Chalcedonians and, in one instance, their protection of the Jews, he tapped into a strand of political thought that runs through the *Doctrina Addai* and the *Julian Romance* that sought an orthodox Christian state, bound by ties of charity and purged of Jews.

The Miaphysite political thought that I see developing out of earlier ideas of cultural independence does not propose any alternative to Roman rule, but it does displace the attributes of the emperor, as the guardian of the Christians and preserver of orthodoxy, onto local holy men and non-Christian rulers.

<sup>54</sup> See Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 44 for Constantinople as a mirror of heaven.

<sup>55</sup> S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, 1990). By removing the Miaphysite angle from John's work, seeing him solely in a tradition of Syriac spirituality (xv), and by failing to distinguish how John selects from religious writing in Syriac and Greek to make Miaphysites a political force within the wider empire (8–27), Harvey does not do justice to the political ramifications of John's writing.

Within the Roman empire, Constantine's conversion to Christianity involved the appropriation an important status column that idealised ascetic conduct, self-sacrifice and piety.<sup>56</sup> The fifth-century ecclesiastical historians portray this ideal in their victorious orthodox emperors, scattering their enemies through prayer. But this combination also left emperors open to criticism if they failed in these ideals and in the Miaphysite texts of the sixth century we see the emperor being displaced from the status column that looked up to ascetic leaders, and his role given to others.

In the final chapter I examine who these others might be. John of Ephesus' history and the multiple accounts that were produced in the aftermath of the massacres of Christians at Najran provide two such examples: the kings of Axum and the rulers of the Ghassanid Arabs. I argue that the imperial ideas of a Christian Roman empire, the precursor to the Byzantine Commonwealth that Obolensky found in state-centred sources of the later empire, were manipulated by both Miaphysite leaders and non-Roman kings. The monopoly of the Roman emperors as sole Christian rulers was broken in this development of Miaphysite political thought, in which an international Miaphysite community that straddled many states and empires sought protectors and adjudicators for its internal schisms. Chapter 7 examines this situation, at the end of the sixth century, when a Miaphysite community, without ever providing any alternative to Roman rule, began to displace its expectations for protection and adjudication to local holy men or to non-Christian rulers.

By placing parts of the Syriac literature of the fifth and sixth centuries into its political context, in and alongside the Roman empire, I will examine the emergence of different conceptions of a Suryaya people, that shared a language and foundation myths and, to varying degrees, a shared territory and religion. Therefore this investigation of the invention of identity in the aftermath of the spread of Christianity and its subsequent divisions sees cultural production in the eastern Mediterranean as an essentially *political* activity.

<sup>56</sup> 'Status column' refers to a group that aspires to certain shared values or forms of behaviour, for whom display of this behaviour determines relative cultural prestige and hierarchy within the group. See also B. Turner, *Status* (Milton Keynes, 1988), 65–9.

## Classification in a Christian Empire

The relationship between Christianity and the Roman state was the product of two intertwined processes. The ecclesiastical structure had been modelled since the third century on the structure of the Roman state, and imperial intervention and arbitration was an assumed feature of any church that claimed orthodoxy by the fourth century. The gains of imperial patronage for bishops and clergy ensured that many looked to Rome or Constantinople for preferment. The feeling of hope that was created at Constantine's conversion was embedded in the first ecclesiastical history, that of Eusebius of Caesarea, which provided a model for later writers under Theodosius II, such as Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret of Cyrhus.

But simultaneously, the culture of third-century Christianity that the emperors adopted emphasised asceticism and personal piety. Christianity's twin inheritances, as the religion of the martyrs and as an organ of the state, were combined in the fifth-century empire, to give Roman emperors a divine mandate that flowed from piety, and a personal relationship with God which would anathematise the histories of their Arian opponents, creating an equation between civilised Roman rule and orthodox Christianity.

### Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Ecclesiastical Historians

An important strand in Christian-Roman thought in the fourth century, stretching from Eusebius of Caesarea (263–340) into the fifth century, grafted the fates of the empire and Christianity, and saw the Christianisation of barbarian peoples as a means of extending

Roman power.<sup>1</sup> These thinkers used an Aristotelean category of the natural slave within their own portrayal of those excluded from the orthodox, Roman world, a world overwhelmingly represented as non-urban, that awaits redemption and improvement by messiah, saint, or emperor. Thus the category of men that lacked self-control was associated with the bestial life outside the city, a characterisation that saw a non-urban life, and the lack of the proper government that nurtured reason, at the root of cruel, barbaric behaviour. The characteristics of these natural slaves could be attributed in various ways both to barbarians outside the Christian empire and to rebels and heretics within it.

In the context of a Christian empire, the barbarians' lack of government was used to present opposition to a divinely ordained state as an indication of irrationality or sinfulness. The model of the Devil's rebellion against God also influenced this image: the *vanitas* of the oriental barbarian was re-employed in Biblical terms to paint the rebel as an over-confident and proud opponent to God and God's emperor. In some circumstances these rebels can also share the characteristics of the urban mob, constantly fickle and disagreeing with one another, and lacking the discipline, unity and self-control of the civilised. Heretics also shared these characteristics. Heresy was an indication of irrationality, through the rejection of an obvious single divine truth, and this was represented in the terms of natural slavery that were used to attack actual barbarians by polemicists such as Synesius of Cyrene.<sup>2</sup>

Eusebius' image of the fallen man is a parade of stereotypes. His barbarian is the opposite of the man on the path to salvation, who has been improved by urban culture. He saw the state of man after the Fall as having reduced to that of animals, a situation where men were prevented from improving themselves by the malign influence of their fellow men:

in the past man was not capable of receiving Christ's wisdom . . . despising God's command . . . he exchanged divine delights for a cursed earth and after

<sup>1</sup> Summarised in F. Paschoud, *Roma aeterna: études sur le patriotisme romain dans l'Occident latin à l'époque des grands invasions* (Paris, 1986), 178–86.

<sup>2</sup> Synesius, *De Regno*, esp. 20 (ed. Terzaghi, 46–7).

him came those who were worse and, with a few exceptions, chose a brutal style of life. They abandoned thought of cities or states or of art or law, but lived as nomads in the wilderness, savage and uncivilised (ἄγριοι και ἀπηνειῖς) beings. Here they destroyed natural reason (ἐκ φύσεως λογισμοῦς) by self-chosen wickedness . . . giving themselves over to iniquity and corrupting one another.<sup>3</sup>

The ecclesiastical historian imagines his primitive fallen man as a nomad: it provides the archetype of primitive, Godless existence. It is a state that has no hope of changing into a superior system on its own, since mankind has made the choices that led to the Fall by its own free will and is responsible for its own degeneracy, which finds its most distinctive symbol in the cannibalism of the fallen man. This primitive image is also tied to pride and an over-estimation of man's own abilities, just as the third and fourth-century historians mocked barbarians and orientalising rulers for their over-ambitious plans and their *vanitas*.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the fallen man's choice of rebellion, and the barbaric character that results from this choice, can be justifiably punished by God: 'the cannibals sought to fight against God . . . and he scattered them with plague and famine'.<sup>5</sup> This is only changed by a *deus ex machina*, the ministrations of Moses to the fallen man, prefiguring the coming of Christ and the conversion of Constantine: man is saved from its irrationality and its fallen state through 'pre-existent rationality' (προῶν λόγος) that is embodied in the Ten Commandments and the 'natural reason destroyed by self-chosen wickedness' that is replaced by the eternal divine reason.<sup>6</sup>

So for Eusebius the nomadic archetype of the fallen man is a result of a chosen state of rebellion, one that is justifiably punished by God by natural disaster, but also one that can be reversed by the Divine Logos, a force that he also equates with the emperor Constantine. Yet Eusebius does not explicitly engage with the issue of converting those outside the empire: he has a model of a *gens Christiana* that inherits

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1.2. 19 (ed. Bardy, 10).

<sup>4</sup> Dauge, *Barbare*, 422–3.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1. 2. 19 (ed. Bardy, 10). Cannibalism was an indicator of nomadic barbarity—it was a suspension of the natural order that occurred in a rabid mob or as an extreme example of the savage diets of those living outside the city. B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), 207–11.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1. 2. 21 (ed. Bardy, 11).



the history and covenant of the Hebrews, but this is essentially equated to the Roman empire, which takes on the unique agency of the people of Israel in the Old Testament within Eusebius' history. Thus his history is a record of the success of the orthodox. As Averil Cameron notes, the language of bestiality and irrationality, as was used in the archetype of the fallen man, demarcates and conflates pagans, heretics, and Jews from the orthodox.<sup>7</sup> This connection was pursued in the later heresiologist, Epiphanius of Salamis, who sees 'Barbarism' and 'Scythianism' as mothers of all the heresies, alongside Hellenism and Judaism. This connection tars Hellenic *paideia* by associating it with the barbarity of man after the fall and before the incarnation, as well as affirming the connection between barbarian characteristics and heresy.<sup>8</sup>

However, the roles played by heresy and barbarians in imperial justifications for rule would change as the fourth century progressed. Constantine had stressed his military prowess to justify his rule before a belligerent and powerful army.<sup>9</sup> But the increasing employment of barbarian troops, the collapse of government in the West and the need to construct religious and political alliances with the barbarian successor kingdoms there meant that the nature of the discourse changed as the source of the emperor's mandate for rule shifted from one of constant victory to his piety.<sup>10</sup> There was a panegyric shift following Adrianople that rewrote the acceptance of Gothic federates under their own leaders as a Roman diplomatic coup.<sup>11</sup> This trend was continued in those ecclesiastical historians who succeeded Eusebius: where before the military emperor had established his power over barbarians, now orthodox emperors could be portrayed overcoming heretics, neatly avoiding their defeats in the West and their tribute to

<sup>7</sup> Averil Cameron, 'Jews and heretics: a category error?', in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen, 2003), 346–50.

<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 1. 2–4 (tr. Amidon, 24–32).

<sup>9</sup> Note the anti-barbarian slogans of his coinage e.g. *Deballator gentium barbarum*. A. Chauvot, *Opinions romaines face aux barbares au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C.* (Paris, 1998), 81–2.

<sup>10</sup> This trend is discussed in K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1989), 121–2.

<sup>11</sup> Discussed in Chauvot, *Opinions*, 292–3.

the Persians. The indicators of divine disfavour that Eusebius had applied to the fallen man were now more securely tied to the irrational creatures of the current age, external barbarians and heretics, who opposed the order of empire and orthodoxy in such a way as to bolster the prestige of the Theodosian dynasty.

These ecclesiastical historians re-employed stereotypes about the barbarian to extend the shift in panegyric that had redefined the source of the emperor's victory and to connect the negative stereotypes of the barbarian onto the opponents of orthodoxy. Orthodox Christianity, like the classical image of the Roman empire, was seen as a force for improvement. For Socrates Scholasticus (c.380–c.440), orthodoxy became the virtue from which all others flowed: it allowed an emperor or a bishop to perform his tasks well and was the prerequisite for dealing with the classical past.<sup>12</sup> An orthodox priest might give lessons in rhetoric or understand *paideia*, whereas someone inclined to heresy would fail to understand the lessons of the classical past in a Christian context through half-digested learning and be led into heresy.<sup>13</sup> Both in the instance of the orthodox emperor and the priest, the virtues of reason and self-control are tied to the orthodoxy of these individuals. Thus a heretical priest is defined by his tendency to blend falsehood and truth, while the emperor's self-control is treated in the same breath as his pious *askēsis* in the contemporary history of Sozomen.<sup>14</sup> In this scheme, prosperity is the direct reward for piety: the prayer of Theodosius scatters the army of the pagan usurper Eugenius and Valens' murder of orthodox priests leads to a famine in Phrygia.<sup>15</sup>

In this schema, the characteristics of the barbarian are blurred into those of heretics and usurpers. This is exemplified in the Goth Gainas who is an example of all three.<sup>16</sup> He seeks 'unjust domination',

<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to focus on Socrates, though Sozomen also discusses the roles of barbarians and Jews in a Christian empire.

<sup>13</sup> I. Krivushin, 'Socrates Scholasticus' Church History: themes, ideas, heroes', *BF* 23 (1996), 95–107. Also see the poor education and subsequent heresy of Aetius the Syrian in Socrates, *HE* 2. 35 (ed. Hussey, 11–25).

<sup>14</sup> Socrates, *HE* 1. 6 (ed. Hussey, 11–25) and Sozomen, *HE* Introduction (ed. Bidez and Hanson, 1–5).

<sup>15</sup> Socrates, *HE* 5. 25 and 7. 18–20 (ed. Hussey, 647–9 and 766–75).

<sup>16</sup> Socrates, *HE* 6. 6 (ed. Hussey, 668–76).

spurred on by his wish to acquire churches for the Arians. Irrationally unable to be content with his fortune as master of soldiers in Constantinople he abuses the trust that had foolishly been put in a barbarian, revolts, and is put to death. Arians,<sup>17</sup> and sometimes pagans, are subject to similar stereotypes. They consciously wish to blend falsehood and truth and show their irrationality by failing to see the self-evident truth of orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> And they, like barbarian hordes, are typified as lacking in self-control and naturally prone towards dissent, 'constantly disagree amongst themselves and are always of differing opinions'.<sup>19</sup>

Socrates' stereotype of heretics includes their relationship to the urban mob, where he employs a similar use of barbaric characteristics to that seen in Ammianus' arrest of Peter Valvomeres or his account of the riots in Rome at the election of Damasus.<sup>20</sup> The riots over episcopal elections in Alexandria are blamed on 'the partisans of George the Arian, in consequence of which many were killed . . . God alone knows what caused this disturbance, but fatal accidents often occur when the population is riotous (στασιάζη)'.<sup>21</sup> Socrates' pretended ignorance of the cause of these riots is purely stylistic: the cause of faction is, in the context, Arianism, since orthodoxy ensures the prosperity of the empire. Heresy, like Christianity for Ammianus, is a negative influence on the crowd that brings out their evil side. By contrast, the help given to the 'orthodox' by monks is never painted in such dark tones.

The focus of the history on an imperial orthodoxy that brings victory removes almost all agency from his barbarian foes. External barbarians are seen as a kind of natural disaster: Constantius II's Arianism is punished by 'an incursion of the Franks into Gaul and

<sup>17</sup> The notion of a united Arian opposition was a polemical construct by the supporters of Athanasius to tar the *homoian* party with the doctrines of Arius. See D. Gwynn, *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of 'the Arian Controversy'* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Socrates, *HE* 1. 6 and 1. 9 (ed. Hussey, 11–25 and 57–85).

<sup>19</sup> Socrates, *HE* 2. 6 and 5. 20 (ed. Hussey, 186–7 and 617).

<sup>20</sup> *Res Gestae* 15. 7. 4; 27. 3. 12 (tr. Rolfe, 1. 161; 3. 19). Also see discussion in E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. R. Task (Princeton, 1953), ch. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Socrates, *HE* 2. 15. Also see the massacres blamed on Macedonius in 2. 16 (ed. Hussey, 206–12).

earthquakes at Antioch' and barbarians are mown down by thunderbolts and plagues when they aid the usurper John against Theodosius II.<sup>22</sup> Proclus' sermon following the latter event leaves little room for independent barbarian agency in a vision of imperial Christianity inspired by Ezekiel: 'Prophesy against Gog, son of man. For I will judge him with death and blood and hail. I will rain fire and brimstone upon him and his bands and nations. And I will be magnified and glorified and known in the eyes of many nations and they shall know I am the Lord'. The descendants of Gog are foils for the emperor to show his prowess, though in the Christian empire this is a prowess that flows from piety: 'the providence of God has rewarded the meekness of the emperor'.<sup>23</sup>

When the barbarians win, or are granted a modicum of individuality, it is to punish heresy.<sup>24</sup> Even when barbarians convert, like the Burgundians during the Hunnic invasions, they do so as a result of Roman power and to illustrate the emperor's piety: 'seeing that the Roman God protected those that feared him' they defeated the Huns 'though they were leaderless and few in number'.<sup>25</sup> This highlights the panegyric function of ecclesiastical history, which tells the story of the victories of the orthodox emperors. Barbarians had been a foil for the emperor to demonstrate his mandate of victory, but now they were also foils for a mandate of piety, in a vision where the facts of history could be trimmed to the wind.

Thus Socrates seems a more direct inheritor of panegyrists than fifth-century secular historians. Socrates, like his contemporaries Sozomen and Theodoret, focuses on the self-control of the emperor, which, in Christian terms, is reflected in his orthodoxy and piety. The contrast with more secular forms of history-writing is instructive. Writers such as Priscus seem more prepared to indulge in relativism, either because of personal experience in the tradition of the historian-traveller or because other ethnicities provided a mirror to criticise the empire. From the perspective of the genre of chronicles,

<sup>22</sup> Socrates, *HE* 2. 10 and 7. 43 (ed. Hussey, 193–9 and 830–1).

<sup>23</sup> Socrates, *HE* 7. 43 (ed. Hussey, 830–1).

<sup>24</sup> See the vignettes involving Mavia, queen of the Saracens, in Socrates, *HE* 4. 38 and 5. 1 (ed. Hussey, 564–5 and 574).

<sup>25</sup> Socrates, *HE* 7. 30 (ed. Hussey, 801–2).

Christianisation seems to have provided a new and effective means of stereotyping opposing groups and placing them outside a Nicene orthodox history that could be traced back to Constantine. The use of self-control as a positive symbol for civilised, rational behaviour was now constrained by its associations with orthodoxy. This insistence upon orthodoxy produced a tighter mesh for judging Roman rulers and historical protagonists in general. And this development in political thought bolstered the stability of fifth-century Christian emperors. Its effectiveness is testified by the longevity of rulers like Arcadius and Theodosius II even in periods when northern barbarians were dissecting the Western empire.

### Improvement and the Christian Empire

In the fifth century, the rhetoric that connected the self-control of individuals, or the Roman people as a whole, and its effects on their environment was used in an increasingly Christianised diplomacy and in the imagination of a Christian commonwealth extending beyond the boundaries of the empire. This was an idea that has its roots in ethnographic ideas that were not explicitly Christian. The idea of the beneficial effects of cultural contact go back to the expansionism of the Roman Republic, in an era when the 'improvement' of subject peoples was part of the Roman justification for frequent war and their distinctive system of citizenship. We see this reflected in the panegyric of the third century, where rule by a usurper is equated to barbarian slavishness, in an extra-imperial world where mankind's potential for free thought cannot be achieved. Witness, for instance, the pagan panegyrist of Constantius I at his *adventus* to Britain in 297, where he praised Britons 'remade as free men and as Romans in the true light of the empire'.<sup>26</sup>

Notions of the stages of development of different peoples and potential of advanced states to improve them had contained a religious dimension in some pagan circles. Thus the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus includes a religious dimension to his ethnographic

<sup>26</sup> Cited in S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1991), 27.

analysis of neighbouring peoples. He proceeds from the Huns 'unreasoning beasts unbound by religion... men without hearth (*lare*), law or settled life' to the Burgundians, who are distinguished by their sacral kingship and their alleged shared descent with the Romans, which makes them suitable allies against the irreligious and disorganised Alamanni.<sup>27</sup>

Roman paganism made distinctions between '*religio*' and '*superstitio*', between the practice of civilised peoples and barbarians. Religious change was seen in part of a wider framework of change stemming from cultural contact, especially the improving influence of organised, settled states upon their neighbours. Thus there were models for the religious improvement of neighbouring peoples that were adopted by a Christian empire. The heavy emphasis on the orthodoxy of the emperors meant that the expansion of the empire's boundaries came to include the conversion of neighbouring peoples as well as expansion through war, just as the improving potential of Roman civilisation was increasingly linked to Christianisation. The presence of Christian missionary activity in diplomacy is a reflection of a world that increasingly saw orthodoxy itself as a sign of civilisation and rationality and had taken on religion alongside *Romanitas* as a supra-ethnic identity.

Eusebius of Caesarea's view of *gens Christiana*, while Romano-centric, could accommodate cultural difference: Syrians or Phrygians could be portrayed pejoratively as barbarians. Yet he approvingly cites the Addai legend of the letter of Christ to Abgar the Black of Edessa and acknowledges his use of Syriac sources.<sup>28</sup> And, even when discussing heresy he does not equate peoples or regions to heresies. Thus there is no discussion of why Montanism was popular in Phrygia or Galatia and he does not attack the Syriac backgrounds of Tatian or Bardaisan when discussing their heresies, as one might expect of later authors, even speaking approvingly of Bardaisan's skill in Syriac and the translation of his works into Greek.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Res Gestae* 31. 2. 11 and 23. 17. 5 and 28. 5. 11–14 (tr. Rolfe, 3. 387 and 186).

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1. 13 (ed. Bardy, 1. 40–5).

<sup>29</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 4. 29–30 (ed. Bardy 1. 213–15).

On suspicion of Syriac speakers see the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 16 (tr. Dawes and Baynes, 17) and J. Fontaine, 'Chrétiens et barbares', *Romanobarbarica* 2 (1977), 27–57

The two deviations from this pattern are significant and tell us about Eusebius' equation of the Christian world with the Roman empire. The first are the Samaritans who, following Jewish prejudice and the popular representation of Simon Magus, he sees as a race of magicians.<sup>30</sup> The second is the Mesopotamian Gnosticising religion of Manichaeism. Eusebius calls Mani 'ὁ μαγεὺς' (using a false etymology of the prophet's name) and 'a barbarian by speech and custom, devilish and insane... combining false and godless doctrines and bringing a poison from Persian lands'.<sup>31</sup> Yet Mani's 'barbarism of speech' was his use of Syriac, the same language that was looked on favourably in Eusebius' assessment of the Addai legend.<sup>32</sup> It is conceivable that Eusebius was unaware that Manichaean texts were probably originally in Syriac, but the main thrust of his criticism seems to be the origin of the new religion. Mani can be safely seen as a barbarian chiefly because he comes from Persia, and this origin colours Eusebius' view of his 'speech and mores'.<sup>33</sup> This portrayal displays the same prejudice as Diocletian's law against the Manichees in 297, in which he calls them importers of 'savage Persian laws'.<sup>34</sup> So for Eusebius, like Diocletian, Manichaeism was barbaric because of its extra-Roman origin, whereas his condemnation of 'heretics' within the empire shies away from connecting ethnicity and heresy. In Eusebius' scheme Christianity was the religion of the Roman empire, which meant that its constituent nations all had to be allowed membership of a *gens Christiana* that could be denied to non-Romans.

Similarly, Socrates' support for the rigorist, but tolerated, schism of Novatianism makes distinctions between different 'nations' within

who discusses Tertullian's view of Marcion. On Bardaisan see H. J.-W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen, 1966).

<sup>30</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 2. 13. 3 (ed. Bardy, 1. 67).

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 7. 31 (ed. Bardy, 2. 221).

<sup>32</sup> For Mani's use of Syriac see S. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: a Historical Survey* (2nd edn., Tübingen, 1992), 92 and 100.

<sup>33</sup> Mani is given a complex familial and intellectual history in Socrates, *HE* 1. 22 (ed. Hussey, 124–9) where he is cast as the Scythian slave of a Persian master, in a literal application of the fusion of the representations of heretic and barbarian.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in P. Brown, 'The diffusion of Manichaeism in the later Roman Empire', *JRS* 59 (1969), 92–103, at 92.

the Roman empire without surrendering their Christianity or their Romanitas:

The Phrygians appear the most temperate (*σωφρονέστερον*) of nations and are seldom guilty of swearing, while the Scythians and Thracians are given to anger and the easterners to sensual pleasure (*ἐπιθυμητικῶ . . . δουλεύουσι*). But Phrygians are not prone to such vices . . . so they readily responded to the letter of Novatus. They abhor fornication and adultery and do not esteem circuses and theatres: there is no race on earth so self-controlled as the Phrygians and Paphlagonians.<sup>35</sup>

Here Socrates gives the Phrygians national characteristics that make them seem self-controlled and proto-Christian by nature, anticipating any accusations of Montanism that might traditionally have been made against Phrygia.<sup>36</sup> So Socrates sees Romanitas and Christianity acting as tied forces for improvement, where the Phrygians were prepared for proper worship by their customary self-control and their rejection of the temptations of urban life, while recognising that the space within Roman borders was neither fully Christianised nor fully civilised (like the Thracians and Egyptians), as well as accepting that different forms of Christianity might all co-exist as multiple orthodoxies (to defend his position on Novatianism).

This model for the co-existence of many races under the umbrella of orthodox Roman rule is most succinctly seen in Socrates' account of the council of Nicaea, in which he quotes the miracle of Pentecost:

There were ministers of God, devout men of every nation under him [Constantine]: Parthians, Medes, Elamites and Mesopotamians, those who live in Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and Cyrenaica, strangers from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.<sup>37</sup>

The quotation continues the Eusebian theme of Constantine as a Christ-like *deus ex machina*. If Pentecost was a reversal of Babel, then Nicaea, gathered by the emperor, is seen here as a reversal of a cultural Babel, in which the different bishops, while retaining their national identities, come to an orthodox agreement as constituent

<sup>35</sup> Socrates, *HE* 4. 28 (ed. Hussey, 546–51).

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 5. 16. 1 for Montanism as 'the Cataphrygian heresy' (ed. Bardy, 2. 46).

<sup>37</sup> Socrates, *HE* 1. 8 (ed. Hussey, 35–7).



parts of Constantine's empire. The choice of quotation may also have a linguistic undertone, since Greek was the lingua franca of the council, so it may be that the Greek language as well as imperial sponsorship allows the council's orthodox decision.<sup>38</sup> In this vision disparate peoples, represented by their bishops, are brought together under Christian rule and Roman culture, and are to be grouped together, to be distinguished from the irrational world of pagans, Jews, and heretics. The presence of Persians in this scene, another legacy of the Pentecost quotation, also emphasises the potential of peoples beyond the empire to share in its orthodoxy. This image does not contradict the Eusebian model of threatening alien influences coming from outside the empire, but it does suggest that it is possible for Roman orthodoxy to affect the rest of the world, in a Christian formulation of longstanding ancient claims to universal rule by Rome.

The ecclesiastical historians follow the model of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* that sees the spread of Christianity beyond the borders of empire as a feature of the emperor's personal virtues, to be seen in the same light as his conquests of barbarians: 'he [Constantine] annexed Scythians and Blemmyes and illuminated the ends of the world with true religion, as far as India and the uttermost ends of the earth.'<sup>39</sup> Theodoret describes the conversion of India (a term used here to describe the kingdom of Axum) in similar terms: 'God's light shone for the first time on India. The courage and piety of the emperor became celebrated throughout the whole world and the barbarians, having learnt by experience to prefer peace over war, were able to enjoy social intercourse and many people embarked on long journeys.'<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen before, the virtues of the emperor are the source of the improvement of the whole world. Like the British panegyric, Theodoret uses the image of the light-giving emperor, where light stands as a simile for the virtue-bestowing capacity of Constantine. The model also includes within it the classical emphasis on the *pax*

<sup>38</sup> F. Millar, *A Greek Roman empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)* (Oxford, 2006) stresses the importance of Greek as the language of Chalcedon in 451.

<sup>39</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 1. 8 (tr. Cameron and Hall, 76).

<sup>40</sup> Theodoret, *HE* 1. 23 (ed. Parmentier and Hanson, 73–4).

*Romana*: Roman rule, seen here in universal and Christian terms, will solve the divisions of the world and its potential to squabble and fight, an inclination which is a feature of the extra-imperial world, of unreformed barbarians and heretics.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, this peace will allow travel, and hence the contact with the empire that allows the Alexandrian missionary Frumentarius to travel to Axum, the first step in the improvement of the periphery through contact with the empire proper.

The same themes are built upon in Theodoret's account of Constantine's letter to the Persian shah, Shapur II, on behalf of the Persian Christians. Here he proclaims that, 'aided by God from the farthest bounds of the ocean . . . peoples enslaved by many tyrants have been given fresh life by the protection of the state.'<sup>42</sup> In the 'Indian' example, Theodoret had focused on the disunity and warlike nature of peripheral barbarians that is made peaceful by Roman and Christian influence.<sup>43</sup> Here he focuses on another side of their barbarity, that is slavishness, their propensity to accept the rule of despots, a condition that prevents them achieving their potential as free men.<sup>44</sup> The phrase builds on Pauline imagery of Christianity as the bringer of true life and true freedom and applies it to a specific political situation, in which the rivalry of Rome and Persia could be re-cast as a battle between Christian and pagan, a move that distanced orthodox emperors both from their 'barbarian' opponents and from the military defeats of their third-century pagan predecessors.

In the conversion narratives the ecclesiastical historians emphasise the civilising power of the Roman emperors over peripheral peoples in their missionary accounts. In so doing they Christianise earlier Roman claims to universal rule and intensify the religious dimension of the improvement of barbarian peoples. But, in the two major

<sup>41</sup> Compare Sozomen 2. 6 (eds. Bidez and Hanson, 58): 'the barbarians of the Rhine and Danube changed to a gentler and more rational observance'.

<sup>42</sup> Theodoret, *HE* 1. 25 (eds. Parmentier and Hanson, 77–80).

<sup>43</sup> Compare the discussion of babbling, irrational Indians in Alexandria described in C. Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers: the Dynamics of Empire* (London, 2004), 145–7.

<sup>44</sup> Compare Socrates' *HE* 1. 1 (ed. Hussey, 1–2) account of Constantine's defeat of Maximus that 'freed the Romans from slavery' and the same feature in the British panegyric, above, where conquest means that the Britons are 're-made as free men'.

conversion narratives that the histories share, in Axum and Iberia, Christianity is brought to non-Roman peoples by Roman prisoners who, as in the case of Frumentarius amongst the Axumites, have become partially acculturated but remain Roman.<sup>45</sup> In the Axumite case it is stressed that the ordination of a local hierarchy was conducted under the authority of the bishop of Alexandria: the historians are at pains to emphasise that Ethiopia is not autocephalous and that Christianity's channels of authority all look to the patriarch of Alexandria. In this vision Christianity is a Roman phenomenon that is exported to the rest of the world, rather than being a means of empowering indigenous foreign traditions.

A similar emphasis on the connection between missionary endeavour and Roman influence in the depiction of Symeon the Stylite, which Theodoret of Cyrrihus develops in his *Historia Religiosa* of the 440s.<sup>46</sup> Here he is 'the famous Symeon, the wonder of the world, known both to all the subjects of Rome and to the Persians, Medes, Ethiopians and the nomadic Scythians, to whom he has taught his love of labour and philosophy'.<sup>47</sup> As in the accounts of the ecclesiastical historians, the universality of Christianity is shown by the presence of the religion amongst these alien, unconquered neighbours of the Romans. Here Symeon is an improving force, who inculcates a wish to labour and philosophise, characteristics that are drawn from the classical debates on the barbarian and the *eudaimonia* of civic life. In the terms of Aristotle's natural slaves, it is the barbarians' disunity and failure to cultivate their land that prevents them from founding free cities in which to exercise their reason. Theodoret acknowledges this as 'human nature', before observing that Symeon's deeds are beyond nature.

Theodoret's Symeon demonstrates this role more directly in his correspondence with the 'queen of the Ishmaelites' and the Persian shah, sending them holy oil and curing their infertility.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, he is a magnet for their subjects, receiving 'not only the inhabitants of

<sup>45</sup> Socrates, *HE* 1. 19–20 (ed. Hussey, 115–23).

<sup>46</sup> For dating see P. Canivet, *Histoire des moines de Syrie. Histoire Philothée par Théodoret de Cyr: texte critique, introduction, traduction et notes* (Paris, 1977), 31.

<sup>47</sup> *HR* 26.1 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 158).

<sup>48</sup> *HR* 26. 20–1 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 200–4).

our parts of the world, but also Ishmaelites, Persians, Persarmenians, Iberians, Himyarites and men more distant than these, and those from the extreme west; Spaniards, Britons and Gauls.<sup>49</sup> These accounts allow us to see an emphasis on the role of religion in diplomacy. Firstly, as in the ecclesiastical historians' account of the conversion of Iberia, Christianity's reputation as a healing cult is hoped to have a positive influence in the conversion of neighbouring rulers. And secondly, we can already see the areas of missionary and strategic concern of Justinian's Persian wars in the sixth century: Symeon's pilgrims, and the reputation of the saint, are already seen in the contested zones of those wars; the Caucasus, mostly under Persian control in this period; the Arabs living between the two empires and the kingdoms in Axum and the Yemen. Additionally, Symeon's western pilgrims emphasise the continued unity of Christian faith, and the focus of this on Syria, in an era when the Roman empire was losing its grip on the provinces of the west but still hoped for a re-conquest that would be realised, in part, under Justinian.

The pilgrimage scenes in the *Life of Symeon* are a microcosm of Theodoret's hopes for the future of the Christian Roman empire. These scenes are embedded in a life whose saint functions as part of the empire, which delivers political oracles on the invasion of the Huns and Persians<sup>50</sup>; makes judgements in matters of dispute<sup>51</sup> and rouses local governors to action.<sup>52</sup> Theodoret uses his missionary saint as part of a wider project to maximise Syria's ascetic prestige, but this does not diminish the fact that his Syrian saint acts on behalf of an entire Christian empire.<sup>53</sup>

This twinning of a Christian *oikoumenē* with Roman claims for universal empire, was a novel feature of the fourth and fifth century. The notion of divine protection for a Christian state is present in Ambrose or Jerome, who use religion to bolster older assumptions

<sup>49</sup> HR 26.11 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 180–2).

<sup>50</sup> HR 26.19 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 198–200).

<sup>51</sup> HR 26. 26 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 210).

<sup>52</sup> HR 26. 27 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 210–12).

<sup>53</sup> An empire that would employ an increasingly Christian diplomacy, e.g. the conversion of the Laz king Gubazes before Daniel the Stylite in 467: *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 51 (tr. Dawes and Baynes, 36). See further examples in R. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy* (Leeds, 1992), 140–3.

about the inferiority of barbarians.<sup>54</sup> But the series of images employed in the ecclesiastical historians and the lives of Symeon show a notion of Roman culture and Christianity working together as part of the universal *oikumenē*.<sup>55</sup>

Comparing Theodoret with his intellectual ancestors illustrates a particularly Syrian version of this transformation in Christian universalism. A pupil of the second-century Edessene philosopher Bardaisan, who wrote the *Laws of the Countries* against belief in astrologically determined fate, had seen the differences between nations as purely a matter of custom, rather than a consequence of their pre-ordained nature. In his schema, Christians are a new people who have their own customs that liberate them from the ways of the people around them: 'those in Gaul do not marry men, those in Judaea do not circumcise themselves; those in Persia do not commit incest; those who live amongst the Gelians do not commit adultery and those who live in Edessa and Hatra do not enforce harsh penalties against thieves and adulterers'.<sup>56</sup>

Theodoret engages with this image in his *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* in a chapter addressed, like the Bardaisanite text, *On Law*. Here he objects to the Persian customs of incest and open burial that they have learnt from Zoroaster, but notes of their Christian populations that: 'they do not believe in the power of the Romans but are submitted to the empire of the crucified one. Augustus and Trajan did not subject them to Roman law, but they came because of the heavenly gifts of the Gospels . . . submitting themselves to the laws of strangers in their own lands'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly: he notes, 'the Massagetæ [Huns] have abandoned their custom of sacrificing and eating their old people . . . the Scythians have stopped entombing people alive . . . and the Tibarenoi have stopped throwing old men from high places'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Chauvot, *Opinions*, 436–46.

<sup>55</sup> The combination of an exposure to *paideia* and Christianisation is also paralleled inside the empire, eg. the education of pagan children using Christian texts in Antioch: H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, tr. G. Lamb (Madison: 1981), 325.

<sup>56</sup> Bardaisan, *Laws of the Countries* (ed. Drijvers, 61).

<sup>57</sup> Theodoret, *Cure of Hellenic Maladies*, 9. 33–4 (ed. Canivet, 2. 346).

<sup>58</sup> Theodoret, *Cure*, 9. 35 (ed. Canivet, 2. 346).

Bardaisan's motif, the transformation of local mores into a single *gens Christiana*, is retained by Theodoret but focused on barbarian peoples outside the empire who are the targets of contemporary missionary activity in Persia and north of the Danube, Crimea, and Caucasus. Unlike in his ecclesiastical history, Theodoret is not writing a panegyric work for the emperor but a refutation of paganism that undermines the significance and antiquity of the Hellenic intellectual past. But, while he does not praise contemporary Christian emperors, the contrast between the empires of Trajan and of Christ distances the contemporary empire from its pagan past and glorifies the achievements of a Christian empire compared to its predecessors. Like Bardaisan, Theodoret adopts Christianity as an ethnicity, and this allows him to criticise the achievements of great Roman emperors of the past. But, additionally, Theodoret views Christianity as a superior version of Roman law, an improving force that has been extended beyond the conquests of pagan emperors. By comparison, states of any kind are absent from Bardaisan's account: Theodoret differs in basing his description on contemporary missionary programmes and contrasting a Christian empire, ruled, in theory, by Christ, to its pagan past. And it is through Theodoret's hagiographic collection, the *Historia Religiosa*, that we can observe the consequences of his assertions of a Christian empire and the equality of all people, both in the practice of Christianity by 'barbarians' and the mandate for 'the state' to intervene in the religious practices of its 'barbarian' hinterland.

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## Controlling the Barbarians. The First Syrian Hagiographic Collection

The last chapter set out the manner in which ecclesiastical historians reflected the Christianisation of the Roman state and imperial claims to universal rule with regard to neighbouring peoples. An important feature of this process was the Christianisation of classical ideas of self-control, which became embedded in the heresiology of the ecclesiastical historians. This chapter will investigate how this categorisation was applied within the empire to distinguish virtue and orthodoxy amongst the Christians of mid-fifth century Syria in the first indigenous hagiographic collection, the *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret of Cyrrihus, and its representation of the Nicene heroes of the past and its whitewashed, de-clawed descriptions of their successors, the attractive yet dangerous charismatics of his own day.

The collection is written on the same model as its Egyptian predecessors of the 420s, such as *The Lausiaca History* of Palladius. Like Palladius, Theodoret provides a series of sketches of famous monks, describing their miracles and asceticism, focusing on the region surrounding Antioch, Beroea, Apamea, Chalcis, and Zeugma. The Syrian collection can be seen as an attempt to establish the antiquity of Syrian asceticism to rival these Egyptian texts and to associate this legacy with contemporary monks of Theodoret's Antiochene Christology and with Theodoret himself, as their friend, protector and hagiographer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the clustering of contemporary descriptions in the *HR* around the theologically Antiochene regions of Apamea and Cyrrestica see Tompkins, *Relations*, 44. I. G. Tompkins, *The Relations between Theodoret of Cyrrihus and his City and its Territory, with Particular Reference to his and this Historia Religiosa* (Oxford, unpublished D.Phil., 1993), 44.

This investigation of the collection will allow us to examine two phenomena. First, it provides evidence for the variety of religious practice within the Syrian provinces, and its connections with the two of the founder-figures of Nicene Christianity from Mesopotamia. Importantly, we can observe that, despite the barbaric associations of these Aramaic-speaking holy men and their proximity to dangerous heteropraxy, these holy men were vehicles for a prestigious religious tradition that Theodoret sought to appropriate.

Secondly, the collection allows us to examine how the mechanisms by which Theodoret subverted these charismatics; a snapshot into the long negotiation over the place of flamboyant ascetics within the church that often occurred below the level of full-blown accusations of heresy. By trimming the geographical parameters of his work and by monitoring, excluding, or explaining away the conduct of more radical ascetics, we can see how Theodoret used his hagiographic collection to create orthodox examples for contemporary asceticism. Where earlier authors such as Tatian had used their Christianity to champion barbarian histories independent of the Romano-Greek tradition, in Theodoret's hands we see the centripetal effects of official Christianity, which could monitor and affect religious practice deeper into the rural hinterland of the empire than ever before.

## PART I

### Self-Control and Philosophy amongst the Barbarians

Self-control is an important product of saintly asceticism in Theodoret's collection. It receives emphasis in his introduction, in a principal saintly exemplar of the fourth century and in the lives of the saints of Theodoret's own day.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the role of the collection as a record of examples and *apophthegmata* make the text itself, as well as the behaviour of the monks, a vehicle for this self-control. But this representation is also a polemical one. Self-control is an important

<sup>2</sup> *HR* Introduction, 6; 4.7 and 11; 8.8; 15.13 and 16.13 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 133–6, 304–8, 316–18, 388–42).



feature in the representation of pagan philosophers, such as those described in Eunapius of Sardis' *Lives of the Sophists*, which serves as one of Theodoret's models. And classical philosophy in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle more generally had seen self-control as a product of ordered urban living: Synesius of Cyrene had called Egyptian monks barbarians and condemned their use of manual labour.<sup>3</sup>

What is striking about the *Historia Religiosa*, by contrast, is how Theodoret embraces their barbarian representation in terms of their diet, dress and language. Monks such as Marcianus 'consumed only a little bread and water' and Macedonius is known as 'the barley-eater (*κριθαφάγον*)'.<sup>4</sup> Theodoret comments in his conclusion, 'On Charity', that his saints ate 'grass like irrational animals (*ἀλόγοις*) or soaked pulses, which cannot give heat to the body'.<sup>5</sup> The absence of oil from these diets would have been striking in a Mediterranean context, especially in a province that produced so much oil in this period: it was not just the preserve of the city, but an assumed part of the diet, even if it had to be bought.<sup>6</sup> To the second-century Pergamene doctor Galen, the diet of Theodoret's ascetics would have seemed a diet of famine foods.<sup>7</sup> In a society where diet created boundaries between ethnicities and classes, the diet of these monks gave them the trappings of a new ethnicity and a new class: they would have seemed un-Roman and unsuitable to be philosophers thanks to a diet 'fit for irrational animals'.<sup>8</sup>

Theodoret sets his monks apart in a similar way in his description of their clothes and physiognomy, frequently inverting the standard Suetonian physiognomic characterisation that saw virtue in the beautiful. Thodosius and Romanus 'wore [their] hair long and unkempt, stretching down to [their] feet'; Maesymas the Syrian 'never changed his tunic or his skin cloak (*σιούραν*)' and a Persian disciple of Julian Saba has 'a soul more glorious than his physique'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, long hair,

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Canivet, *Histoire*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> HR 3.3; 13.1 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 250 and 474).

<sup>5</sup> HR *On Charity*, 2 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 256–60).

<sup>6</sup> P. Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1999), 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>8</sup> Jerome directly asserts the importance of diet for self-control within an ascetic regimen. See Ep. 125. 7 (ed. Labourt, 7. 119–20).

<sup>9</sup> HR 2.6; 10.2; 11.1; 14.2 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 206, 436, 454; 2. 10).

such as that worn by Romanus, had been identified as a Hunnic characteristic by the emperor Arcadius and had been banned from Constantinople, even for slaves, together with the wearing of skins.<sup>10</sup> So at a time when the law was identifying a set of characteristics as barbaric, Theodoret embraced them in his depiction of holy men.

Though Theodoret's depiction of the language of the saints is more complex, the Syriac speech of these men should also be read in the context of their 'barbarian' lifestyles and their cultural distance from the customs of the city. The use of Syriac is a distinctive feature of the *parrhēsia* of Aphrahat (*HR* 8) and Macedonius (*HR* 10) before Valens. He includes several saints who are either Syriac monoglots or who speak Aramaicised Greek, such as Maesymas, Macedonius, and Abraham Cyrrihus and in his record of the foundation of a monastery by Publius, he portrays acceptance of both Aramaic and Greek speakers into a single monastery as an exceptional event.<sup>11</sup>

Theodoret's emphasis on the 'barbarity' of his Christian philosophers is indebted to the tradition of Tatian.<sup>12</sup> This tradition deliberately praised Christianity's barbarian heritage in contrast to the classical inheritance. That which was good in pagan culture was ascribed to the reception of Greek knowledge from the Egyptians, who had received an inkling of the truth from Moses. A distinctive view of history, in which the religion of Noah and Moses was represented as an Ur-Christianity from which the Jews later departed, was used in this tradition to keep the Christian God's monopoly on philosophic truth while diminishing the achievements of pagan intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

Tatian's polemic attacks Greek assumptions of cultural superiority and Greek invention of all cultural goods. He lists the many skills and

<sup>10</sup> *CTh* 14.11.4. Also see discussion in P. Garnsey and C. Humfress, *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (Cambridge, 2001), 96–100.

<sup>11</sup> *HR* 5.5; 13.2; 14.2; 17.9 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 334 and 476; 2. 10 and 46).

<sup>12</sup> Though Tatian was classed as a heretic in the second century for his Gnostic and Encratite views (Eusebius, *HE* 4. 29), as the author of the Syriac Gospel Harmony, the *Diatessaron*, he was of considerable cultural importance for Christians who used Syriac, who probably included Aramaic speakers in Theodoret's north Syria. Thus, just as Theodoret's *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* had borrowed from Bardaisan's *Laws of the Countries*, it also shows the influence of this other potentially heretical theologian.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Droge, *Homer or Moses?: Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen, 1989), 51–86.

traditions that the Greeks have borrowed from Isaurians, Carians, Phrygians, Babylonians, Persians, and Egyptians<sup>14</sup> before castigating them for 'leading foreign words in triumph and wearing their plumes like jackdaws'.<sup>15</sup> Alongside this attack on Greek culture, he attacks Greek religion and its corrupting influence on society, with its overpaid doctors,<sup>16</sup> philosophers, and oracles,<sup>17</sup> and its theatre, and gladiator shows.<sup>18</sup> The two sections of his attack culminate in a broad comparison of Christian and Greek customs and an assertion of the superior antiquity of Moses, an analysis he is qualified to make because he is 'a philosopher among barbarians, born in the land of the Assyrians, educated first in your learning and second in what I now profess'.<sup>19</sup>

Tatian's attack used the image of the barbarian in two ways. First, it involved the whole extra-Greek world: a host of different cultures compete with the Greeks on a level playing field. The debate has been 'relativised'. And secondly, Christianity is presented as the barbarian philosophy, the schema from Moses to Christ that has always existed.<sup>20</sup> This view of history contrasts markedly with that which we saw in Eusebius, a difference that hinges on the two authors' different imagination of the barbarian and of their focus in their accounts of human development. Tatian's history focuses on a pre-lapsarian core in the prophets that stretches through the pre-Christian era and self-consciously calls these figures barbarians, in contrast to the Greeks: Christianity is the restoration of a primal barbarian doctrine.

Theodoret's *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* retains the thrust of Tatian's argument, 'relativising' Greek and denying its special claim to cultural dominance. In its fifth chapter, *On Human Nature*, Theodoret defines humanity by its freedom of judgement, which underlies its potential to achieve salvation.<sup>21</sup> He goes on to assert the unity of all humanity, and therefore its shared potential for reason, using a genealogical

<sup>14</sup> *Oratio ad Graecos*, 1 (ed. Whittaker, 2–4).

<sup>15</sup> *Oratio*, 26 (ed. Whittaker, 48–50).

<sup>16</sup> *Oratio*, 18 (ed. Whittaker, 36).

<sup>17</sup> *Oratio*, 19 (ed. Whittaker, 38–40).

<sup>18</sup> *Oratio*, 22–3 (ed. Whittaker, 44–6).

<sup>19</sup> *Oratio*, 32, 40, and 42 (ed. Whittaker, 58–60, 72 and 76).

<sup>20</sup> See the discussion in Droge, *Interpretations*, 85–110.

<sup>21</sup> Theodoret, *Cure*, 5. 5–19 (ed. Canivet, 1. 271–31).

argument: all races, and both sexes, are sprung from a single human union in Adam and Eve.<sup>22</sup> He notes that 'the prophets of truth could not speak good Greek' and compliments the traditional juxtaposition of Greek and Jewish history,<sup>23</sup> demonstrating the greater antiquity of the latter and denying the special status of Greek language and culture: men of barbarian language have defeated Greek eloquence and their 'good myths' have been banished.<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew truths have been translated into Latin, Persian, Egyptian, and Scythian: Greek has lost the special status that it once held and the popular level at which the new religion has been expressed allows it to reach out to 'artisans, weavers, housewives and servants' and to achieve the permanence that was impossible for any Greek philosophical school.<sup>25</sup>

This has important implications about the potential of those labelled 'barbarian'. If the true divine order, which had always been embedded in nature,<sup>26</sup> was now presented to all in Christ's covenant, then so was the practical virtue of self-control, the shared goal for Christians and pagans alike. Like Tatian, Theodoret emphasises the potential of barbarians to do philosophy and the superiority of Christian philosophy, except that Theodoret puts flesh on the skeleton provided by the earlier apologist. On one hand, Christian saints can be judged against criteria for which the founding figures of the pagan *paideia* had already been striving, the practice of virtue received from knowledge of the divine and expressed in control of the soul, and beat the pagans at their own game. While on the other, since Christianity aims at a self-control that is achievable by all, it has become legitimate to judge all Christians, including barbarians, by the exemplars presented in hagiography.

Following a Christian tradition that emphasised the greater antiquity of this 'barbarian philosophy', Theodoret presents barbarian characteristics in a positive light by emphasising its debt to Old Testament precedent and its purpose in the acquisition of charisma and *parrhēsia* for his saints. Though aligned to a Platonic tradition,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 55–6 (ed. Canivet, 1. 244).

<sup>23</sup> Droge, *Interpretations*, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Theodoret *Cure*, 5., 60–4 (ed. Canivet, 1. 246).

<sup>25</sup> *Cure*, 5. 66 (ed. Canivet, 1. 248).

<sup>26</sup> *Cure*, 12. 6 and 20–32 (ed. Canivet, 2. 420 and 424–8).

he, like Tatian, uses 'barbarian' in a positive sense, in contrast to the barbarian fallen men of Eusebius.<sup>27</sup> For Theodoret, Christianity comes out of barbarian origins. This is a relativistic view of history in which Greek culture has no special dominance, which acknowledges the contribution of the 'barbaric' saints of the *Historia Religiosa* but which also demands that the whole empire, barbarian Aramaic-speakers included, might be judged according to the new *paideia* of religious orthodoxy, defined, in this case, by the hagiographer.

### The Founders of Syrian Asceticism

Theodoret's concern with the barbarian origins reflects the reality of the second century spread of the religion into the region beyond the Greek speaking cities of Syria and into a multilingual hinterland, where Greek competed with numerous Aramaic dialects. The emphasis on the breadth of Christianity was, in part, a means of attacking contemporary urban pagans, but it also reflects the role played by 'barbarian' holy men in the Nicene opposition to the Arian movement that had threatened to dominate the church in the fourth century. For ecclesiastical historians in the fifth century, of whom Theodoret was one, the victory over the Arians was a crucial foundation myth in the creation of an orthodox empire, and Nicaea would become the touchstone of orthodoxy even in a Persian Christianity that had never been affected by Arianism.<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, it also meant that 'orthodoxy' was tied to the reputation of Nicaea and the clerics who had publicly stood against those later perceived as Arians.<sup>29</sup> Many local churches had representatives of this tradition, by which their priests could trace their orthodoxy back to the great defenders of orthodoxy of the past. And, though these defenders of orthodoxy had all taken a stand against Arianism,

<sup>27</sup> For the inversion of earlier linguistic stereotypes see Peeters, *Tréfonds*, 72–6. Eusebius, *HE* 1. 2. 19 (ed. Bardy, 10).

<sup>28</sup> D. Winkler and W. Baum, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London, 2003), 13–15. Notably, Aphrahat, a fourth century theologian writing near Mosul, never mentions Arianism.

<sup>29</sup> Theodoret himself wrote a lost polemic against the Arians, mentioned in his ep.113 (ed. Azéma, 3. 62).

they were a diverse group, reflecting the variety within Christian practice and the different cultures in which Christianity was practised before the consolidation that occurred after Constantine.<sup>30</sup> The existence of these shared founder-figures forced later hagiographers to discuss potentially inconvenient figures, who combined Nicene Christology with 'heteropraxy', such as Jacob of Nisibis and Julian Saba in Mesopotamia. But such hagiographies also provided an opportunity to rewrite the exemplars of multiple Christian communities and to mould a church that was uniform in terms of religious practice as well as Christology.

Theodoret's account of the monks of Syria is held together by chains of discipleship and by the impression of continuity in ascetic performance and imitation of the figures of the Old and New Testament. It is striking, therefore, that the first two saints in the collection inhabited a Mesopotamian world, in or around the cities of Nisibis, Edessa and Samosata, far to the north of Theodoret's other saints and his bishopric at Cyrhus.<sup>31</sup> Theodoret embeds these ascetics, Julian Saba and Jacob of Nisibis (*HR* 1 and 2), into a text dealing with ascetics much further to the south, who in Theodoret's own day shared his Antiochene Christology. These figures are invoked as the founders of a Syrian ascetic tradition, but Theodoret's image is a polemical vision of Syria, that excludes the Mesopotamian ascetics of the fifth century, who might also have harkened back to the careers of Jacob and Julian, but whose Christology or extreme ascetical views opposed those of Theodoret. The hagiographer acknowledges the popularity of the heteropract Mesopotamian saints and their role in inspiring contemporary ascetics further south, but he subverts the examples of piety they provided and transforms them into an idealised bishop and monastic founder.

The career of Jacob of Nisibis had long been associated with that of Ephraem the deacon, the famous poet and theologian, who wrote in Syriac. This relationship is recalled not only in the Syriac *Life of Ephraem*, but also in the Nisibene hymns of the poet himself.

<sup>30</sup> On the variety of Christian practice see, for instance H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'Early Syriac Christianity: some recent publications', *VC* 50 (1996), 159–77 and R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (London, 2004), 1–22.

<sup>31</sup> See the geographical summary by Canivet, *Histoire* 1. 32–6.

Moreover, this was a connection that would remain in the later transmission of the reputations of both men, in both the Syriac *Life of Jacob of Nisibis* and in the versions of the *Life of Ephraem* that found their way into Georgian, via Armenian, in the second millennium.<sup>32</sup> A similar association existed between Jacob of Nisibis and another opponent of Arianism and relatively popular subject of Syriac hagiography, Eusebius of Samosata, who twice fell foul of Arian emperors and was only able to defy his emperors with the help of his flock and his fellow bishops.<sup>33</sup>

However, both of these associations have been removed in Theodoret's account of Jacob. Though he is aware of the connection between Ephraem and Jacob, as he shows in his description of the Persian siege of Nisibis in his ecclesiastical history and models the introduction to his hagiographic account on the Syriac *Life of Ephraem*, he suppresses the presence of Ephraem in his *Historia Religiosa*.<sup>34</sup> Theodoret appears to have deliberately suppressed the existence of Ephraem in his hagiography, even though he discusses him, albeit briefly, in his ecclesiastical history.

The issue here is the chain of succession for his Syrian monks: Ephraem's connection with the city of Edessa after his exile from Nisibis following the Persian conquest would raise the issue of the absence of other Edessene figures.<sup>35</sup> This was especially significant in the light of the recent volte-face of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa, who had attacked Theodoret's Antiochene theology and commissioned the first Syriac translations of the works of Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret's great opponent. A similar problem existed for the legacy of Eusebius of Samosata. Samosata itself was displaced geographically

<sup>32</sup> P. Peeters, 'Jacob de Nisibe', *AB* 38 (1920), 287–373; *Georgian Life of Ephraem* (tr. Garitte).

<sup>33</sup> *Syriac Lives of Eusebius of Samosata* (ed. and tr. Devos). The appeal of the saint as a champion of Nicaea is brought out by the reoccurring comparisons made between the Arian emperor Valens and Julian the Apostate.

<sup>34</sup> The siege of Nisibis is described in Theodoret's *HE* 2. 30 (eds. Parmentier and Hanson, 167–70). The connection between *HR* 1.1 and the *Syriac Life of Ephraem* is discussed by Peeters, 'Jacob', 306–11.

<sup>35</sup> The fluctuations in Theodoret's descriptions of the flow of river Mygdonia through Nisibis in his two accounts, in *HR* and *HE* suggest he was not personally familiar with the city. See Peeters, 'Jacob', 300–1 and Canivet, *Monachisme*, 106–7.

and theologically from the province of Syria II, which Theodoret wished to praise as a hub of orthodox asceticism descended from Jacob of Nisibis 'another Constantine, rooting out briars and dressing new vines'.<sup>36</sup> The great Mesopotamian bishop, and his near-contemporary, the cenobitic founder Julian Saba, are invoked as founders for Syrian asceticism, before the hagiography promptly writes Mesopotamia itself out of the picture, suppressing the scene of Julian's burial next to the martyrs of Edessa that Ephraem and Julian's followers relate,<sup>37</sup> and concentrating on his activity in Antioch<sup>38</sup> and Cyrrhus<sup>39</sup> before turning to lives set in lands further south.

These two figures were used by Theodoret to elucidate an ideal model for the ascetic bishop, as a defender of the empire, destroyer of heretics and champion of social welfare, and of the hermit as a prelude to cenobitic monasticism.<sup>40</sup> The two lives serve as types by which later ascetics could be judged, their orthodoxy assured by their involvement in the Arian controversies. Where Ephraem's Jacob had been praised in very general terms, Theodoret's Jacob has his capabilities as bishop demarcated quite precisely to match Theodoret's own behaviour in Cyrrhus, where he beautified and protected his city and confiscated the books of the Marcionites and Tatian's *Diatessaron*. Moreover, Theodoret's Jacob, like his hagiographer, had had an early monastic life before becoming a bishop. Thus Theodoret is constructing his 'type' of the bishop, bolstered by ascetic practice and given divine approval through miracles, with his own conduct in mind.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, his image of Julian Saba, compared to the roving sleepless ascetic of the pseudo-Ephraemic *madrashé*, is also intended to

<sup>36</sup> Ephraem, *Nisibene Hymns*, 14.3 (ed. Beck, 38).

<sup>37</sup> Ephraem, *Hymns on Julian Saba*, 6.6 and 12.8–10 (ed. Beck, 6 and 59). On the attribution of only the first four hymns of this collection Ephraem see E. Beck, *Hymnen auf Julianos Saba* (Louvain, 1972), v. These hymns circulated alongside accounts of the Edessene martyrs Shmouna, Guria, and Habib. See S. Griffith, 'Julian Saba: father of the monks of Syria', *J ECS* 2 (1994), 185–218, at 198.

<sup>38</sup> *HR* 2.17–20 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 234–40).

<sup>39</sup> *HR* 2.20–2 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 240–4).

<sup>40</sup> *HR* 1.8, 10, and 11; 2. 3 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 174–86, 200).

<sup>41</sup> His construction of an ideal bishop using the image of Jacob is discussed in D. Bundy, 'Jacob of Nisibis as a model for the episcopate', *LM* 104 (1999), 235–49, at 244.



support an institutional church, in which individual charisma should evolve into cenobitic monasticism, with its more formalised relationship with the clergy.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, this life confirms the impression of the account of Jacob of Nisibis that monasticism is a suitable training for the priesthood and episcopate, following the model of Julian's star pupil, the bishop Acacius.<sup>43</sup> Precedents like this may underlie Theodoret's approval of the ordination of flamboyant and barbarian holy men such as Maesymas and Abraham—their place is to be integrated within their communities in the terms of the institutional church.<sup>44</sup> Where the Egyptian hagiographic collections had praised illiterate ascetics, Theodoret's collection would go a step further in developing participants in a variety of indigenous Syrian ascetic traditions into founders of a more familiar Pachomian monasticism to rival the founder-figures of Egypt, in the wake of the explosion of cenobitism in Syria in the previous generation, c.375–425.<sup>45</sup>

The four lives (*HR* 3–6) that follow are all set in the core region of Theodoret's collection, the region around Chalcis and Antioch. Together with the two Mesopotamian examples, the early lives provide an ideal type of monastic behaviour against which later conduct can be judged. These six lives establish the ideal of the ascetic practice, in terms of poor diet and clothing,<sup>46</sup> the results of this practice, self-control and grace,<sup>47</sup> and the connection between ascetics and the episcopate.<sup>48</sup> They also establish the originality of Syrian monastic practice: the inspirations for cenobitic foundations could be traced back to founder-figures such as Marcianus, an inhabitant of Cyrrhus, whose followers, Eusebius and Agapetus continued or founded other cenobitic communities and received a follower of Julian Saba named James the Persian.<sup>49</sup> A similar motive could be suggested for the

<sup>42</sup> e.g. (Ps-)Ephraem, *Hymns on Julian Saba*, XVI.3 (ed. Beck, 64); *HR* 2. 3–4 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 200–4).

<sup>43</sup> *HR* 2.22 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 242–4).

<sup>44</sup> *HR* 14.2 and 17.4 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 10 and 38–40).

<sup>45</sup> See Tompkins, *Relations*, esp. 11 and Canivet, *Histoire*, 1. 252, for the recent establishment of cenobitism in the region.

<sup>46</sup> *HR* 1.2; 2.2; 3.3 and 6.3 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 162, 196–8, 250, 350).

<sup>47</sup> *HR* 1.3; 3.6; 4.7; 4.11; 6.1–2 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 164, 256, 304–6, 316–18, 346–8).

<sup>48</sup> *HR* 3.11 and 5.8 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 266–8 and 340).

<sup>49</sup> *HR* 3.4 and 4.8 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 252 and 308–10).

inclusion of the otherwise bland entry on Publius, who is credited with developing a cenobitic monastery from an earlier lavra.<sup>50</sup> Theodoret has included a spectrum of local monastic foundation legends and interspersed them to create the impression of an indigenous Syrian monasticism and to use these visions of the past to influence contemporary religious practice.

In these accounts Theodoret emphasises his ascetics' orthodoxy. We see this particularly in his description of the hermit Marcianus. Theodoret lists the heresies that he opposed: not only the Arianism but also 'the Euchites [Messalians], who hide under a monastic habit the disease of the Manichees'.<sup>51</sup> Marcianus is also portrayed defending the Nicene ruling on the definition of Easter to another elderly ascetic.<sup>52</sup> This issue of opposition to the Messalians and the spectrum of extreme ascetical ideas that existed in the late antique Syria will be treated in greater detail at the end of this chapter, but we should note here that Theodoret is defending his own orthodox reputation as well as the orthodoxy of the founding figure of Cyrrethian monasticism against which others will be judged. Theodoret himself had been a monk at the monastery of Nikertai near Apamea, which had been founded by Agapetus, a disciple of Marcianus.<sup>53</sup> So Theodoret's own right to act as a commentator on asceticism relies in part on his connection to this founding father and his orthodoxy.

## PART II

### The Perceptive Hagiographer

An important element of Theodoret's hagiographic collection is his presentation of himself as a recipient of an orthodox ascetic tradition alongside the monks and as a suitable arbiter for their actions. He presents himself in his hagiography as the bridge between the world

<sup>50</sup> *HR* 5.3 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 332).

<sup>51</sup> *HR* 3.16 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 278).

<sup>52</sup> *HR* 3.17 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 278–80).

<sup>53</sup> See Tompkins, *Relations*, 11.

of charismatic ascetics and heretics (a world in which he is able to perceive the orthodox and exclude the heretical) and the elites of the cities, who might have appreciated his high Attic style.

This role as a judge of orthodoxy on behalf of a wider audience is the key to the use of hagiographic collection to constrain and manipulate a potent but potentially dangerous charismatic tradition in Syria. As the first section established, Theodoret himself, as a monk of Nikertai,<sup>54</sup> was part of a chain of discipleship that stretched back to opponents of Arius and followed the example of Acacius of Beroea as a bishop who maintained close relations with holy men.<sup>55</sup> Theodoret also emphasises his own importance as a personal witness for the miracles of later holy men: he is presented as an ideal orthodox bishop, in the mould established by Acacius and Jacob of Nisibis, which in turn qualifies him as an observer of the monks and someone who can admonish their extremes. Thus his personal ascetic training from holy men<sup>56</sup> and his unique access to anti-social ascetics as their bishop supplemented his membership of a monastery with a reputation for orthodoxy.<sup>57</sup> It is this standing that prompts Zeno's admission that bishops and priests are to ascetics as soldiers are to civilians and Theodoret's criticisms of the ascetic Polychronius, in which he tells him to take companions and to lower his demands on himself. Theodoret's hagiography presents bishops in general, and Theodoret in particular, as suitable judges of ascetic conduct.<sup>58</sup>

The most telling example of this comes when the Devil speaks to Theodoret in Syriac, asking him to spare the Marcionites.<sup>59</sup> Here Theodoret reminds his audience that Syriac is not just an indication of ascetic *xeniteia*, but is also the language of heretical groups such as the Messalians and Marcionites, who are beyond the pale. As a speaker of Syriac who can also write this high Attic literature, Theodoret establishes his own ability to bridge the two cultures, between a more urban, Greek-speaking, regulated world, and the more rural,

<sup>54</sup> Canivet, *Monachisme*, 63 and 187–92.

<sup>55</sup> HR 3.11; 4.7 and 21.10 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 266–8, 304–6; 2. 82–4).

<sup>56</sup> HR 9.4 and 13.18 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 412 and 506).

<sup>57</sup> HR 18.2 and 20.3 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 54 and 66).

<sup>58</sup> HR 12.4 and 24.4 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 460–2; 2. 142–4).

<sup>59</sup> HR 21.15 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 94).

Syriac-speaking world with its potentially dangerous charismatics. Thus it is the hagiographer himself who can separate the virtuous ascetic from the heretic in this frontier environment, which mixes the life of the Old Testament with ancient heresies, long since removed from 'mainstream' Christianity.

Theodoret's presence in the hagiography allows him to dwell on his own episcopal role and his condemnation of unsuitable ascetic practice. Simultaneously, the structure of the hagiographic collection allowed him to remove the unwanted elements of popular charismatics silently (or to explain them away in the case of more flamboyant behaviour) or to suppress dangerous local ascetics entirely. The role of the hagiographer as a judge of orthodoxy, who selects older stories and adds his own interpretation, allowed Theodoret to mould the examples in his collection. While the goal of self-control, shared by the martyrs and philosophers of a pre-Constantinian era, might now be achieved by barbarian successors of the prophets outside traditional urban education, the exemplars for this programme were in the hands of the hagiographer.

This editing process can only be established in the broader context of the different forms of Syrian asceticism that co-existed in fifth-century Syria. Theodoret's hagiography only makes sense in the context of the extreme ascetical ideas that Syria was famous for and the ecclesiological problems associated with ascetical leaders in the church who stood outside a normal ecclesiastical framework. The latter took the form of a division of Christian communities between 'the perfect', who devote themselves to prayer on behalf of the wider community, and 'the upright' who take on lesser duties. It is a division of spiritual labour that was associated in antiquity with the Manichees and Messalians; an association that has persisted in the historiography on the subject. However, it is argued here that this division was also a tendency in more 'orthodox' Syrian authors, such as Ephraem<sup>60</sup> or Philoxenus of Mabbug.<sup>61</sup> The fact that individuals such as Ephraem

<sup>60</sup> This issue is rather ignored by Tompkins, *Relations*, 137, when he says that Ephraem was 'a member of an orthodox community who never wished to repudiate its formal structure'.

<sup>61</sup> A Miaphysite i.e. orthodox in the terms of his own diocese of Hierapolis and the regime of Anastasius.

attacked the Messalians does not mean that they were opposed to the existence of ascetic elites holding special powers within a community, only that they disagreed with others over what practices were considered orthodox and the extent of these powers. Theodoret stands apart from these advocates of a bipartite division of spiritual labour in that he denies the distinctive authority of Syrian ascetics outside the parameters of the wishes of their bishops.

### A Spiritual Wild West?

A distinctively Syrian ascetic tradition is best encapsulated in the widespread institution of the *bnay qyama*, the ‘sons of the covenant’, who lived ascetic lives within Christian communities in Syria and in the Syriac churches of Sasanian Mesopotamia and Iran. The powers and the role attributed to these male and female ascetics varied, but they were distinguished by their celibacy, fasting, and liturgical participation, and frequently continued to live with their families or in mixed groups of men and women rather than in the cenobitic communities of Pachomian-style monasticism.<sup>62</sup> For Ephraem, they ‘fill for God the place of many’: an ascetic elite in a bipartite division of spiritual labour that applies to all Christian communities.<sup>63</sup>

There were numerous attempts to control these ascetics, to encourage them to live in communities separated on lines of gender, and to curtail more extreme ascetic practices such as castration.<sup>64</sup> But they remained an important feature of Christian communities within Syria, as we see in the activities of missionaries, such as the late sixth-century ascetic Symeon the mountaineer, or legates, such as Marutha of Maypherkat, who instituted the *bnay qyama* in the communities

<sup>62</sup> On the *bnay qyama* in general see S. Brock, ‘Early Syrian asceticism’, *Numen* 22 (1973), 1–19. S. Griffith, ‘Monks, “singles”, and the “sons of the covenant”. Reflections on Syriac ascetic terminology’, in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft*, *Studia Anselmiana* 110 (Rome, 1993), 141–60 and G. Nedungatt, ‘The covenanters of the early Syriac-speaking Church’, *OCP* 39 (1973), 191–215 and 419–44 discuss the *bnay qyama* as imitators of Christ and the use of the term for the whole church in general and its more specific use for an elite within the church.

<sup>63</sup> Ephraem, *Hymns on the Nativity* (ed. Beck, 173).

<sup>64</sup> *Rules for the Bnay Qyama attributed to Rabbula*, 55 (ed. Vööbus, 49).

they rebuilt or reformed.<sup>65</sup> Though figures such as Chrysostom and Rabbula confronted the independence of these ascetic groups embedded within Syrian communities, the ideas they represented, of asceticism and celibacy at the heart of a Christian life, continued to be attractive, in varying institutional manifestations, until after the Arab conquests.<sup>66</sup>

There is a parallel to Theodoret's holy men, whose miracles are the product of a divine grace that comes from their asceticism and who are portrayed judging quarrels and giving advice, with the major caveat that the latter do so under episcopal supervision, while admitting the authority of the institutional church, and lack the collective identity of *bnay qyama* as Ephraem describes them. One of the most striking differences between the accounts of Ephraem and Theodoret is the case of Julian Saba. For Ephraem he is a wanderer who rejects manual labour and a fixed dwelling place, and for some of Ephraem's followers, Saba is an exponent of the kind of sleepless prayer used by 'Messalians' such as Alexander Akoimetos.<sup>67</sup> But for Theodoret, though he lives on wild plants, he is a stationary founder figure for cenobitic monasticism. Theodoret transforms men like Julian Saba into monastic founders: his snap-shots show the transformation of Syrian asceticism, embodied in individual hermits, into cenobitic forms that claim to perpetuate their reputation and teaching but are organised on the lines of a Pachomian monastery, such as Theodoret's house at Nikertai.<sup>68</sup>

So while both Theodoret and Ephraem recognise the significance of ascetics within Christian communities, Ephraem's have an

<sup>65</sup> John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (ed. Brooks, 1. 229–47).

<sup>66</sup> P. Escolan, *Monachisme et église: le monachisme syrien du IVe au VIIe siècle: un ministère charismatique* (Paris, 1999), esp. 55–69. The continued attempts to regulate extremes of asceticism can be traced in A. Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm, 1960).

<sup>67</sup> Ephraem describes Saba as an *ihidoyo* on the model of Christ in *Hymns on Julian Saba*, 2.13 (ed. Beck, 41), and Ephraem's followers situate Saba's continuous prayers in the mountains and in the wasteland, 17.2 and 22.13 (ed. Beck, 65 and 81).

<sup>68</sup> The genuine poems of Ephraem on Saba do not call him a monastic founder (E. Beck, *Hymnen auf Julianos Saba* (Louvain, 1972), x-xi and S. Griffith, 'Julian Saba: father of the monks of Syria', *J ECS* 2 (1994), 185–218 at 200), but Ephraem's followers, writing a few generations later, do (e.g. *Hymns on Julian Saba*, 6. 21–3, ed. Beck 50).

independence and a physical and institutional position within Christian communities that is denied to Theodoret's ascetics. The distinctive position of this spiritual elite within Christian communities is even more marked in the writings of Aphrahat, a theologian writing in the Sasanian empire of the early fourth century, who compares the *bnay qyama* to the troops of Gideon, and makes baptism a sign of celibate leaders in the vanguard of the church.<sup>69</sup> Vööbus suggested that this reflects the preservation of an archaic baptismal liturgy that restricted baptism to the celibate.<sup>70</sup> Even if the mechanisms are hidden by the lack of sources for the early church in Syria and Mesopotamia, it might be reasonable to suggest more generally that an internal ascetic elite might have allowed a community as a whole to fulfil the strictures intended for individuals in the extreme Encratite texts used in the early church, such as the Acts of Thomas, and, to a lesser extent, the injunctions to be without possessions in the Gospel of Luke.

In a riposte to Vööbus' thesis that Syrian asceticism reflects Manichaean influences, Sebastian Brock has asserted the importance of the Gospel injunctions to be without property as the reasons for Syrian ascetic practice.<sup>71</sup> But we can go further than his claim that Syrians took the Gospel injunctions seriously. There were ascetic movements, both within and outside 'orthodoxy', across the Mediterranean world at this time that did not involve the articulation of the spiritual division of labour that we see consistently across late antique Syria, in a variety of intellectual and institutional forms that sometimes co-existed with Pachomian cenobitic monasticism.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps Syrian asceticism was organised in this distinctive way because of the intensity of the ascetic call in Encratite texts that continued to circulate, most importantly Tatian's *Diatessaron*, the Gospel harmony suppressed by Rabbula and Theodoret in their respective sees in the 420s–440s.<sup>73</sup> Familiarity with a harmony

<sup>69</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 7. 19 (tr. Valavanolickal, 1. 175).

<sup>70</sup> A. Vööbus, *Celibacy: a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm, 1951).

<sup>71</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 1. 109–37 and 158–69 and Brock, 'Early Syrian asceticism'.

<sup>72</sup> See examples below as well as Canivet, *Histoire*, 1. 208 and Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 1. 150–7.

<sup>73</sup> W. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron, its Creation, Dissemination and Significance in Scholarship* (Leiden, 1994), 41–2 and Escolan, *Monachisme*, 78–9. H. J.-W. Drijvers,

initially used for missionary work and then the subject of commentaries that influenced the theology of generations of commentators who were acclaimed as orthodox may have led to the resilience of its ideas and images.

Simultaneously, it is possible that the geographical position of Syriac-speaking Christians in the same regions as powerful Jewish communities meant that the Old Testament, and its exegesis by Jews, may have been a more immediate threat for Syrian Christianity than it was further west, prompting a wide variety of exegetical approaches through contact with Judaism and Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>74</sup> Thus Marcion and Mani rejected the Old Testament entirely in their writings, while Aphrahat relied heavily on Old Testament prophets for exegesis and in his explanation of the liturgy of his church, and Ephraem's poetry is peppered with allusions to figures of vice and virtue from the prophets.<sup>75</sup> None of these figures were Judaeophile—Ephraem is notable for his encouragement of violent attacks upon the Jews—but the Jews provided an intellectual tradition that had to be engaged with and which still attracted Christians.<sup>76</sup> The Nazirites of the book of Judges may have been a particular inspiration to the presence of an ascetic elite within the church and reflect the attractiveness of Jewish ascetic practice, in the past if not the present, that was important for a religion that claimed the Old Testament prophets as its own. Thus Ephraem's representation of the *bnay qyama* as judges and his praise for their 'Naziritic' long hair and the long hair of Theodoret's saints Zeno and Romanus may owe something to Old Testament Nazirites.

'Edessa und das jüdische Christentum', *VC* 22 (1970), 4–33 at 33 suggests that the emergence of fifth-century ascetic heresies are the long-term results of the willingness of third-century Syrian Christians to compromise with encratite groups and to produce 'watered-down' versions of texts such as the Gospels of Thomas.

<sup>74</sup> See also W. Liebeschuetz, 'Problems arising from the conversion of Syria', in D. Baker (ed.), *The Church in Town and Countryside* (Oxford, 1979), 17–25.

<sup>75</sup> See the discussions in Murray, *Symbols*, esp. 7, 11–12, 19–22.

<sup>76</sup> See S. Brock, 'Jewish traditions in Syriac sources', *JJS* 30 (1979), 21–32 on Jewish exegetical technique in Ephraem and Aphrahat. For the importance of Jewish communities in Edessa and Nisibis see Murray, *Symbols*, 6–7.



It is notable that it was this very practice that was, according to tradition, condemned by Rabbula a decade before Theodoret wrote his history: the long hair of ascetics that imitated the Jewish Nazirites was condemned by the bishop of Edessa, perhaps because it was identified as a Jewish practice.<sup>77</sup> We see here how Theodoret's approach to diversity of religious practice could be to co-opt ascetic customs into an episcopal framework and to use the practice for his exegesis, which showed contemporary saints as inheritors of the claims of the prophets. Just as he differed from his teacher Chrysostom in propounding a world of miracle-workers that the Antiochene patriarch had denied,<sup>78</sup> so too Theodoret praised an ascetic tradition that others doubted and portrayed it as an obedient subject of regular ecclesiastical control, while omitting to mention those ascetics who had opposed such control, such as Alexander Akoimetos, and his own suppression of the *Diatessaron*, the text that may have helped to inspire such ascetic devotion in the first place.

### The Messalians<sup>79</sup>

Commentators on, and reformers of, Syrian Christianity, from Ephraem to Chrysostom, Rabbula, and Theodoret all left a role for ascetics in their definitions of orthodox behaviour, though they differ in what should be curtailed and how far it had to be integrated into the ecclesiastical and monastic structures common to the entire Roman world. But it is important to stress that the ascetics with whom they dealt existed on a continuum with those who practised the sort of behaviour condemned in the Messalian controversies of the 380s–420s as Manichaean borrowings: though modern writers have often high-

<sup>77</sup> *Rules for Monks attributed to Rabbula*, 5 (ed. Vööbus, 27).

<sup>78</sup> R. Greer, *The Fear of Freedom: a Study of Miracles in the Roman Imperial Church* (London, 1989), 49.

<sup>79</sup> Good general discussions are provided by D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2002); Escolan, *Monachisme*, 91–123 and R. Kitchen, *The Development of the Status of Perfection in Early Syriac Asceticism, with Special Reference to the Liber Graduum and Philoxenus of Mabbug* (Oxford, unpublished D.Phil., 1997).

lighted Ephraem's role in opposing the Messalians, he shared with them an emphasis on a bipartite division of ascetic duties.<sup>80</sup>

As Stewart has noted, there is a consistent corpus of accusations levelled against the Messalians of the 380s that have their origins in the court records of the trial of the Messalian leader Adelphius by Flavian, the patriarch of Antioch. Descriptions of heresies compiled by a variety of churchmen of differing doctrinal positions are consistent in their characterisation of Messalian belief and practice. They are accused of over-emphasising the efficacy of prayer (thus their name *msallyane/ euchitai*) to the exclusion of baptism, which they believe prompts the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul and freedom from passions. Associated with these practices are their claims to prophecy, their disregard for communion (both the results of their constant prayer), their refusal to work, (instead of which they travelled from town to town to beg), their ascetic appearance (their long hair and ragged clothes), and their desire for sleeplessness (which facilitated constant prayer).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the Messalians accused at Antioch were not trying to leave the traditional church structures. Unsurprisingly, they denied that they were heretics or had been influenced by heretical works, and seem to have represented a force within institutional monasticism.<sup>82</sup>

The identification of a set of doctrines associated with this Adelphius does not equate to the existence of a Messalian movement. After the trial, the collection of accusations may have proved useful to attack those individuals who fled west, prompting the condemnation of Messalians at a synod at Side, but it also shows the usefulness of Messalian as a label against ascetics who were troublesome, especially those who denied ecclesiastical structures or engaged in the wandering begging associated with the men condemned with

<sup>80</sup> For the Messalians as Manichaean see *HR* 3.16 (ed. Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 278). See Tompkins, *Relations*, 137 for Ephraem's opposition to the Messalians.

<sup>81</sup> C. Stewart, *Working the Earth of the Heart: the Language of Christian Experience in the Messalian controversy, the Writings of Psuedo-Macarius and the Liber Graduum* (Oxford, 1991), 53–68 and Caner, *Wandering Monks*, 87–9.

<sup>82</sup> Theodoret notes the purging of Messalians from monasteries near Melitene by Leotius the bishop. *HE* 4.10 (eds. Parmentier and Hanson, 229–30).

Adelphius.<sup>83</sup> It is this motive that may have underlain the final condemnation of the Messalians at Ephesus in 431, following the decisions of numerous local synods from 388 onwards.<sup>84</sup>

Adelphius himself does not appear to have had a school or a set of writings. Instead his behaviour should be seen as symptomatic of tendencies within Syrian ascetic practice towards extreme asceticism and the practice of these strictures on behalf of a wider group. Thus the Mesopotamian *Liber Graduum*, often associated with the Messalians, shows a community divided according to different ascetic duties.<sup>85</sup> But there is a concern for sacraments and the institutional church that was absent from the followers of Adelphius and its theology of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit diverges from that proclaimed by Adelphius at Antioch.<sup>86</sup> The similarity of sixth-century Syrian authors with aspects of the theology of the followers of Adelphius and the *Liber Graduum*, should also lead us to see the reflection of long-standing concerns rather than direct influence, exemplified in the use of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Jacob of Serug and the reference to different grades of ascetic duties in Philoxenus of Mabbug.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore the tendencies that the Messalians of the Antioch trial embody were still live issues in Syria and would remain so. Syria remained renowned for its asceticism, but also for the heretical connotations that accompanied it, as we see from a scene in the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, written in the reign of Anastasius, in which the saint is driven away from a village in Asia Minor because he, as a Syriac speaker, is suspected of heresy.<sup>88</sup> The emphasis that Theodoret placed on his own orthodox and ascetic credentials was connected to the suspicion in which Syrian ascetics were held and his own need to remove dangerous individuals from his account and curtail or explain away details in other lives.

<sup>83</sup> Caner, *Wandering Monks*, 80 and 91–3.

<sup>84</sup> See 'Messaliens' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 15, esp. 1075.

<sup>85</sup> Caner, *Wandering Monks*, 108–9; Escolan, *Monachisme*, 11–40.

<sup>86</sup> Kitchen, *Perfection*, 33–4.

<sup>87</sup> Escolan, *Monachisme*, 94; Kitchen, *Perfection*, 235–7.

<sup>88</sup> *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 16 (tr. Dawes and Baynes, 17).

## Hagiography in Alternative Traditions: Rejection and Appropriation

The remainder of this chapter will examine the reputations of two of these dangerous charismatics, Alexander Akoimetos and Symeon the Stylite, one of whom was omitted in the collection and the other included. Alexander was active in precisely the area and time about which Theodoret was writing, the region between Chalcis and Palmyra at the opening decades of the fifth century.<sup>89</sup> An examination of his *vita* reveals his opposition to one of the main aims of Theodoret's project, which is the obedience of ascetics to ecclesiastical authority, and the use of the same mandate for self-control and succession from the martyrs that had been employed by Theodoret's saints. Alexander's life opens by establishing his opposition: 'putting on spiritual armour he repulsed magistrates, authorities and the rulers of the spiritual darkness of this age the Enemy summoned the people and they set upon our spiritual athlete but he did not fear imperial authority or the people or the bishops'.<sup>90</sup> Alexander is attracted to Syria from his home in the Aegean because of its venerable monastic tradition, and he overthrew pagan temples and 'quelled the frenzy of the pagans with his bold speech' (*parrhēsia*) after becoming dissatisfied with cenobitic monasticism.

He goes on to convert the future bishop Rabbula of Edessa after a series of miracles.<sup>91</sup> Next, he gathers his followers, his 'rational flock', and leads them in the continual night-long prayers, which became a feature of their Acemete monastery at Constantinople, taking God as the direct exemplar for his monastic regimen rather than any previous human exemplar.<sup>92</sup> His followers then travel between the cities of Syria, between Cyrrhus, Chalcis, Palmyra, and Antioch, and are repeatedly driven away by cities who feared famine from the influx of

<sup>89</sup> See Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2, 185–96. The geographical context is further examined in P. Gatier, 'Un moine sur la frontière, Alexandre l'Acemète en Syrie', in A. Rouselle (ed.), *Frontières terrestres, frontières célestes dans l'Antiquité* (Perpigan, 1995), 435–57.

<sup>90</sup> *Life of Alexander*, 2–3 (de Stoop, 658–9).

<sup>91</sup> *Life of Alexander*, 12–22 (de Stoop, 666–74). The section on Rabbula may be a later addition to the text. E. de Stoop, *Life of Alexander*, 564–5.

<sup>92</sup> *Life of Alexander*, 26 and 28–30 (de Stoop, 677–80).

a large begging population or by the patriarch Theophilus of Antioch who feared Alexander's own reputation as a prophet amongst the common people.<sup>93</sup> After he is turned away from Palmyra, it is only through the help of 'barbarians and camel-drivers' that he and his followers survive.<sup>94</sup>

The *Life* appeals to the legacy of *parrhēsia* before pagan emperors and the self-control of the martyrs that was a major model for all hagiography. But its anti-state stance allows it to do so more directly than Theodoret's collection. Bishops are included among the agents of the Devil and the *Life* rejects the need for ascetic inspiration from any other founder figure: the Acemete monks can trace their ascetic practice directly through Alexander to God. Like Theodoret's saints, Alexander performs miracles, controls the natural world around him and calms the rage of those who persecute him. But his followers are excluded from the urban world to which Theodoret's ascetics are tied, through their obedience to bishops and their influence on patronage, and their friends are desert-dwelling barbarians. Mirroring Christ's choice of excluded companions, the Acemete hagiographer emphasises Alexander's friendship with these barbarian camel-drivers in the desert *limes*. Here too, the hagiographer of Alexander occupies the same body of representations that Theodoret uses in the *Historia Religiosa*. Like Eusebius of Teleda (*HR* 4) or James of Cyrrhēstia (*HR* 21) in Theodoret's collection, Alexander combines a *xeniteia*, a life as a stranger among barbarians, with a self-control that was normally associated with the urban world.

The proximity of this 'Messalian' ascetic meant that Theodoret needed to emphasise the non-Messalian ascetic practices of his subjects. The fact that Messalians were not mentioned per se in his *Lives* beyond the single reference in the *Life of Marcellinus* does not mean that they were no longer a controversial subject.<sup>95</sup> Avoidance of manual labour had reoccurred as one of the criticisms of Messalian practice, from the trial at Antioch to the *Life of Alexander*, and Theodoret is keen to use his saints as orthodox exemplars of correct ascetic practice.

<sup>93</sup> *Life of Alexander*, 31–8 (de Stoop, 680–8).

<sup>94</sup> *Life of Alexander*, 35 (de Stoop, 685–6).

<sup>95</sup> Contra Tompkins, *Relations*, 162.

However, just as he emphasises his saints' manual labour, he praises other ascetic features, labelled elsewhere as Messalian, as indications of self-control (such as the saints' sleeplessness). Theodoret accepts certain local customs as part of a laudable orthopraxy, while excluding those customs that had been associated most closely with dangerous charismatics who operated outside the control of the church. We see this distinction most clearly in his introduction, where he employs an extended metaphor to compare the soul of the saint to a charioteer commanding his horses to run in proper order, and sees the saints' continual prayer 'with the tyranny of sleep deposed from their eyelids' and their 'many labours and body-breaking toil' as features of this control of the body by the soul, of the self-control that is aligned to orthodoxy.<sup>96</sup>

Thus his ascetic Theodosius, with his Naziritic long hair, is shown to be within the pale since he weaves creels and mats and ploughs the soil. Similarly, the female followers of Domnina card wool while cenobitic monks provide for *xenodocheia* with their agricultural labour.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, his ascetics are often portrayed dispensing food to visitors, contrasting with the Messalian custom of constant begging.<sup>98</sup>

This representation of his saints engaging in productive labour fulfils the requirements Theodoret sets out in an earlier devotional work, *On Divine Providence*. In it he asserts that men, unlike wild beasts, have hands, 'as befits a rational animal' which allow him to master crafts from weaving and mining to medicine and grammar, except that 'some men fail to recognise God's gifts'.<sup>99</sup> He follows an Aristotelean definition of man as a rational animal, who must achieve his *telos* by living in an ordered state and realise his potential in learning and the crafts, a formulation close to Aristotle's *eudaimonia*.<sup>100</sup> His class of men who fail to realise their potential are modelled on

<sup>96</sup> *HR* Introduction, 6–7 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 132–8).

<sup>97</sup> *HR* 10.2–3; 30.4; 30.6 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 436–42; 2. 244–6).

<sup>98</sup> *HR* 5.3; 13.3; 14.2; 24.2 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 330–2, 476–8; 2. 10 and 140).

<sup>99</sup> *On Divine Providence*, 4.16; 4.22–33; 5.1 (tr. Halton, 52, 54–7 and 59).

<sup>100</sup> 'That which, when isolated, makes life desirable' (*Politics* 1097b 14–15) i.e. the 'good life' that is the product of a rational and leisured existence, which, in Aristotle's terms, is confined to the *polis*.

Aristotle's natural slaves, since they have not used God's gifts to realise their rational potential, except that he sees this as a product of their free-will, rather than being a predetermined characteristic.

Thus, while the barbarian monks of the *Historia Religiosa* are praised for their miracles and self-control, this praise is conditional upon their proper behaviour. Those who reject manual labour, like the Messalians, are outside the system laid down in the introduction to the *Historia Religiosa* and *On Divine Providence*, can still be condemned along quasi-Aristotelian lines. They have failed to fulfil the conditions for their human potential, even if these conditions are now removed from the *polis*.

The Syriac *Life of Symeon the Stylite* illustrates a different sort of problem for the hagiographer.<sup>101</sup> Symeon's fame and his role as a counsellor of emperors and churchmen meant that he could not be easily suppressed. But the Syriac *Life* demonstrates that his followers saw him in the light of the bipartite division of spiritual labour that characterised the *Liber Graduum* or the ascetic models of Aphrahat or Ephraem, in that his ascetic endeavours are performed *on behalf of* a group. Thus he is described at his death as 'a censer bearing the prayers of the faithful to heaven' and his followers pray: 'My lord, bless your servants we beseech you, by your Lord who does what you want'.<sup>102</sup>

At times, his followers also see him as a supra-human, unachievable figure with direct contact to God's messengers, unlike the achievable exemplars of Theodoret's lives who are more pliable to ecclesiastical authority. His disciple tells him 'all creation has come to worship you and He has given you a holiness that does not belong to human kind'.<sup>103</sup> His authority does not stem from asceticism that leads to grace, like Theodoret's monks, but he is picked out by visions during his youth, and receives a personal mandate from the prophets Moses and Elijah. His stylitism fulfils God's purpose rather than fulfilling penitence or superior discipline.

<sup>101</sup> See also the discussions in R. Lane-Fox, 'The Life of Daniel', in M. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), 175–225.

<sup>102</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 116 (tr. Doran, 185–6).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

Where Theodoret had limited himself to comparing his ascetics to these Old Testament figures, Symeon is seen as their friend and protégé, and it is they who tell him to live on a column.<sup>104</sup> And, even if Elijah does tell Symeon to be obedient to priests, and angels remind him to practise self-control, he dispenses blessed earth charms, *hnana*, and holy oil and issues ascetic commands for the village of Gindaris in return for prayer without reference to priests.<sup>105</sup> Indeed the latter shows Symeon transcending the standard ecclesiastical structure, since one would have expected the priest of Gindaris to regulate local practice.

It is this pattern of devotion that seems to have given Symeon his posthumous reputation as a theologian. He is credited with various theological letters and was claimed by both sides in the Christological controversies.<sup>106</sup> And he continues to be represented with a scroll of his writings, as in the icons of the Aleppo school, or in the company of great theologians, such as Ephraem, Athanasius, and the Cappadocian fathers, as in the cave paintings of the Bekaa valley in the Lebanon.<sup>107</sup> But it seems to have been an image that Theodoret wished to subvert. His Symeon is primarily a proselyte to the Arabs and an international Christian spectacle.<sup>108</sup> Symeon is an oracle for agricultural affairs rather than a producer of agricultural miracles. There is no mention of the *hnana* that was seen as controversial in monastic legislation.<sup>109</sup> And his role as an arbitrator replaces the religious commandments he gives to the village of Gindaris in the Syriac life.<sup>110</sup>

Theodoret faces up to the way in which Symeon was viewed when he reports a deacon who naively asks whether he is really a man or an angel. Symeon's sharp rebuke is in line with Theodoret's justification for stylitism itself: it is seen as a reflection of the saint's modesty and his wish to avoid the crowds, a contemporary parallel to the

<sup>104</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 41–13 and 112–13 (tr. Doran, 125–7 and 181–3).

<sup>105</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 33–9, 63–4 (tr. Doran, 120–4 and 141–4).

<sup>106</sup> See C. Torrey, 'The Letters of Symeon Stylites', *JAOS* 20 (1898), 253–76.

<sup>107</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>108</sup> *HR* 26.11 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 180–2).

<sup>109</sup> *HR* 26.19 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 198–200).

<sup>110</sup> *HR* 26.26 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 210).



spectacles of Old Testament prophets. But this justification evades the fundamental issue that Symeon is famous precisely because he has mounted the pillar and the explanation of the Syriac life that stylitism was a response to an angelic vision.<sup>111</sup> This should be seen as an attack on the supra-human interpretation of Symeon that sets him up as a religious lawgiver and the only supplier of efficacious intercession to a whole community: he is a marvel but he is no longer a prophet and visionary with a direct angelic mandate.

This last feature is especially problematic because of the heretical associations of visionaries, who could claim an authority outside the clerical interpretation of scripture or imperial lawmaking, and emphasises the supra-human character of the holy man. The visions of characters in the *Historia Religiosa* must be excised or passed over. Thus Theodoret's accounts of his own visions and that of his ally, James of Cyrrhestica, concern the temptations of the Marcionites, whom the Devil seeks to defend by scaring or pleading with their persecutors.<sup>112</sup> And his account of Domnina (*HR* 30) acknowledges her fame as a visionary but tells us nothing of their content: without condemning female religiosity as irrational, as the *Life of Porphyry* does, Theodoret subverts it by removing the content of these visions that made her attractive to her followers.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusions

The *Historia Religiosa* provides an example of the manipulation of a varied charismatic tradition to the benefit of the urban clerics of Antioch, Apamea, and Cyrrhus. The reputations of miracle-workers and champions against the Arians in the past, who subscribed to multiple ascetic traditions, were connected to contemporary cenobitic institutions and rendered orthodox. The barbaric nature of these saints was used to place different forms of piety and the missionary

<sup>111</sup> *HR* 26.12 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 184–8).

<sup>112</sup> *HR* 21.15–17 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 92–8). See discussion in Canivet, *Histoire*, 1. 122–3.

<sup>113</sup> See the *Life of Porphyry*, 59 and 88 (eds. Grégoire and Kugener, 48 and 69) for the condemnation of female religiosity in the pagan women of Gaza and the Manichaean missionary Julia.

activity of these holy men under the umbrella of mainstream ecclesiastical organization, and this was portrayed on the model of the self-control that, in classical philosophy, was produced by the ancient cities. Here the saints of the villages, countryside and desert were all seen as producers of self-control in an orthodox framework, outside the parameters of earlier pagan civic elites

But simultaneously, the existence of self-control as a gauge for praise and blame allowed the hagiographer to continue to exclude suspicious aspects from his collection, and to suppress the tendencies among some of his ascetics, for visions, avoidance of the priesthood, or for the bipartite attitudes towards spiritual duties associated with many forms of Syrian Christianity, both orthodox and Messalian. The lives and reputations of real monks were used as vehicles for Theodoret's arguments, but inconvenient characteristics were winnowed out in favour of a stereotype of orthodoxy. However, the contrast with the legislation provided by Rabbula in the creation of orthodoxy in his diocese in Edessa is striking. Rabbula bans ascetics from living among secular people; from growing their hair long or hanging irons on themselves (except for those who are solitary); from owning heretical books; from taking on lawsuits; from distributing holy oil, especially to women; from giving the Eucharist if they are not ordained; and from practising self-castration.<sup>114</sup>

Theodoret seems to have agreed with many of these rules: his crackdown on the *Diatessaron* parallels that of Rabbula in his own diocese. And his omission of Symeon the stylite's *hnana* shows a similar concern for the independent powers of holy men outside priestly supervision. But, notably, he includes examples of long-haired wandering monks and expects his holy men to take on lawsuits for the peasantry. Theodoret took a more flexible line than others over the control of ascetic practice in the Syrian hinterland, and, in so doing, made a bid for the control of the spectrum of ascetic traditions that he rewrote in his *Historia Religiosa*. This was a bid that would be rewarded by the translation of his works on his two

<sup>114</sup> *Laws of Rabbula, On Monks*, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20 and *On the bnay qyama*, 10, 18, 22, 53 (ed. Vööbus, 27–31 and 38–49).

controversial founder figures, Jacob of Nisibis and Julian Saba, into Syriac in the sixth century.<sup>115</sup> His version of the *Life of Symeon the Stylite* was widely accepted in the Chalcedonian tradition and, through Severus' only superficial reworking of the *Life*, the Miaphysite tradition as well.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Peeters, 'Jacob', 294.

<sup>116</sup> S. A. Harvey, 'The memory and meaning of a saint: two homilies on Simeon Stylites', *Aram* 5 (1993), 222–35 at 225.

## Theories of Nations and the World of Late Antiquity

The orthodox Christian Roman empire that is invoked in Theodoret's hagiography and ecclesiastical history claimed a deeper influence than the pagan empire of the previous centuries. The civilised expectations of self-control that had been characteristic of an elite urban *paideia* in the Second Sophistic received a wider currency as a characteristic of orthodoxy. Similarly, the notion of the Roman empire as an improving force with claims to universal rule, that had its antecedents in the late Republic, provided a Christian empire with a mandate to intervene in the religious lives of its citizens. The fifth and sixth centuries saw the increased efforts of emperors and their servants both to implement orthodox religion and to demarcate what that orthodoxy consisted of. The use of 'barbarian' protagonists in hagiography, part of the inheritance of Christian self-definition in an era of pagan oppression, also became part of this scheme, providing role models that stood outside the norms of urban culture, but that used an aspect of its *paideia*, to praise and blame the inhabitants of the peripheries of empire that had not normally experienced the full extent of Roman rule.

This view, drawn mainly from texts written in the Syrian provinces at an episcopal level, is essentially centripetal. The texts describe a model for being an orthodox Christian that is universal, where the parameters for orthodoxy were increasingly equated to those for being Roman. But the same era in which these texts were produced also saw a variety of associated, but divergent, invented histories in the territories to the north of the Syrian provinces that are the focus of most of Theodoret's work.

Mesopotamia, the region around Edessa and Amida, had an attractive yet untrustworthy reputation in the Greek-speaking Christian world. We have already seen how Daniel the Stylite was suspected of heresy because of his Syriac speech by one onlooker, while his life presents his Syrian exoticism as one of the features that links him to the reputation of the great Symeon. This history of asceticism, which Theodoret had to absorb and subvert in his *Historia Religiosa*, was not the only thing that set the area apart. Significantly, it was the site of an important invented history, the *Doctrina Addai*, which is unusual in the Roman Near East for its memory of a pre-Roman past, and its presentation of this past in a Christian context.

The influence of this text, and others like it, allows us to investigate the centrifugal political influence of Christianisation, where Christianity, and its emphasis on apostolic origins, led to the evolution of myths about Edessa and the lands that it is supposed to have proselytised. Following chapters will then investigate the evolution of more sophisticated ideas of cultural independence after the Council of Chalcedon, when Roman citizens following a Miaphysite Christology gradually adopted new notions of politics and history. These drew on early Edessene legends or turned the criticism against irrational heretics of the fourth century against reigning emperors in the sixth.

I propose to examine these more centrifugal texts both in the context of recent writing on modern nationalism, and that of wider observations of the religions and cultures of the late antique Near East, based on archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics, as much as on literary evidence.

It is in this process of invention, by which different identities are clustered into a single more complex identity, that I think we can draw a parallel between eras of national formation in the modern period and the centrifugal impact of Christianisation in the late antique Roman empire. As we saw in Chapter 1, in Socrates' image of the council of Nicaea as the Pentecost, the Christian Roman world could be represented as a world of many peoples. This diversity existed under the unity of a single political entity. The Roman state enjoyed a military and legal monopoly in the eastern Mediterranean, and the emperor also controlled a complex ecclesiastical system and was accorded an important role in the jurisdiction of the church as the convener of church councils. Moreover, as we have seen, the

universal claims of Christianity and of the Roman empire were merged in the hands of the ecclesiastical historians and, to varying extents, the writers of law codes and hagiography, which equated what was Roman to what was orthodox and what was self-controlled. The classificatory tools that had once defined the non-Greek world as irrational and barbarian could now be applied to those who were disobedient or heretical.

These powers of the Roman empire seem to distinguish it from being an ethnè of the same order as Syrians, Isaurians, Cappadocians, or Galileans, i.e. being Roman was not to be a member of a descent-based group. Yasir Suleiman's application of the nationalism theory of Rogers Brubaker to the modern Arab world is instructive here. He engages with an Arab world that is culturally united and politically divided, which has spawned nationalist movements that have sought both secular states and ones based upon Islam. These movements have sought both to construct nations out of the provinces drawn by colonial powers and at pan-Arab states, encompassing the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. Suleiman differentiates between the cultural nationalism of territory, myth and public culture and the political nationalism of legal and economic standardisation. For, as he observes, the twentieth-century Arab world has evolved two kinds of nationalism. One shares myths, territory and culture across national boundaries, and is comparable to the Volk-centred, differentiatorist nationalism (like that seen in nineteenth-century Germany), and the other divides the Arab world into many states, creating Syrians, Jordanians, and Iraqis on the model of a French-style state-centred, assimilationist nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

There is a parallel here to the Roman empire and the subordinate ethnies that served it. 'Romans' did not have to be defined ethnically, i.e. a descent-group with shared customs and language. Instead, being Roman, as a category of legal rights, was increasingly identified with being orthodox.<sup>2</sup> The Roman empire was also a claimant to

<sup>1</sup> Y. Suleiman, *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Richmond, 1996), 23–31; R. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 1–13.

<sup>2</sup> P. Garnsey, 'Roman citizenship and Roman law in the late empire', in Swain and Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity*, 133–55, esp. 143–5.

universal rule, a mandate that was provided by its improvement of the world through the conditioning of the behaviour of its citizens (e.g. encouraging settled agriculture or orthodox religion). In this sense it was state-centred and assimilationist. By contrast, ethnies, some of which had a distinctive sense of their own history, and had been set apart by religion, dwelling place, customs, and endogamy, were, on the Suleiman–Brubaker model, Volk-centred and differentialist: one of the functions of their distinctive customs was to remain apart from the rest of society, even within the military or mercantile diasporas of Goths or Jews.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the caveat to comparison with Suleiman's case is that the assimilationist state ruled the differentialist minorities: the latter are 'ethnies' in that they have distinctive views of their own myths, customs, and symbols and live in a defined territory, but their public culture and law overlapped with that of all Roman citizens.<sup>4</sup> Differentialist ethnies could have cultural independence to some extent, but shared the administration, law, and a political thought that stressed obedience to the emperor as the sole ruler of the Christian world. Ethnies were notions of belonging that transcended administrative descriptions that defined people by their province or city, imagined communities that defined themselves through shared myths, symbols, and practices (especially notions of shared descent), often accompanied by a sense of territory or homeland. And these existed alongside notions of being Roman. Both were forms of identity that could be triggered in different circumstances and that were bounded by their own models of behaviour. But how far did these ethnies remain distinct from other Romans? How far was their potential difference rendered significant?

<sup>3</sup> These diasporas are described in A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1964), 2. 611–13 and 865–6.

<sup>4</sup> W. Pohl (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction: the Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), 24 n. 33 observes that, in the late antique West, authors contrasted the Roman *civitas* or *imperium* with the many *gentes* or *nationes*, to whom it brought peace.

### Ethnies in Syria: Jews and Samaritans

For most ethnies integrated into Roman political culture and orthodox religion, the Christian Roman empire provided a shared public culture and law which allowed people to be both Roman and Gothic or, as I shall argue, Roman and Suryaya. Being Roman and being Christian were supra-ethnic categories that coexisted with ethnies defined by their own distinctive practices and ideas of shared descent. This rule is confirmed in its breach by two examples from late antique Palestine: the Jews and the Samaritans, who maintained independent law-making, and, in the latter case, had secessionist tendencies.

Following Smith's ethno-symbolist approach, ethnies are imagined using symbols that unite a group that their members already possess. Myths and traditions are invented to bind a group together, just as they were, on a more sophisticated level, in the nineteenth-century invention of national traditions noted by Hobsbawm. But these myths used previously available material, especially linguistic difference, which became significant in the context of newly invented traditions. These newly significant differences claimed to be ancient and primordial definitions of the group, and, as Shamsul has argued, provided the means by which an ethnie might both maintain its boundaries and monitor the behaviour of those within it.<sup>5</sup>

We can trace elements of this process of linguistic signification in the epigraphic, archaeological, and literary record of first- to sixth-century Syro-Palestine. Here, public indications of Jewish identity seem to have atrophied after the Bar Kokhba revolt only to be re-invigorated in the fourth to sixth centuries. Seth Schwartz has observed that, in c.100–350, there was no 'Jewish society', and that the cultural norms of the elites of Palestinian cities such as Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Lydda, the homes of most of the rabbis reported in the Talmud, were essentially pagan. He notes that the funerary inscriptions of this period; the imagery of funerary mosaics and coins minted within Palestine was not recognisably Jewish and reflects the deep influence of pagan culture.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish society, 200 B.C. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, 2001), 136–55.



Schwartz suggests that the fourth-to-sixth centuries saw a 'Judaisation' of Jews, which was as much an invention of ancient custom by rabbis as the preservation of ancient practice. This process, which he traces in the sixth century record of *halakic* judgements and rabbinic *piyyutim* and the fifth-to-sixth century explosion in synagogue construction, cannot be attributed solely to the growing importance of the rabbis.<sup>7</sup> For the new synagogues of this period clearly ignore rabbinic bans on figural representation. Instead, he suggests, we must look to the different ways in which Jews were governed: now they were treated as a formal religious organization responsible for tax-gathering, while simultaneously being subject to a state-sponsored marginalisation, from the army, the legal profession and the government.<sup>8</sup>

Boyarin has argued that a Roman empire that created orthodoxy by exclusion of outsiders defined Judaism as a religion against which Christianity itself drew its own identity. It was this definition, he argues, that facilitated the dominance of a rabbinic class, who were granted legislative powers over defining who was 'a good Jew' for anyone who thought of themselves as Jewish by any other classification.<sup>9</sup> In Shamsul's terms, Roman law and the institutional development of rabbis, patriarchs and synagogues in the fourth to sixth centuries created a religious elite who could not only influence the development of, and significance of, different Jewish symbols to demarcate the community, but also use their own interpretations

<sup>7</sup> S. Schwartz, 'Jewish-Christian interaction in late antiquity', in R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven, 2003), 197–210, at 208–9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 207. The state's treatment of the Jews as a different fiscal category also built on the growing influence of the patriarch, whose legal judgements were acknowledged in *CTh* 16.8.12–13. See Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 113–17; L. Levine, 'The status of the patriarchs', *JJS* 46 (1995), 1–32; L. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (2nd edn., New Haven, 2005), 459–65.

<sup>9</sup> D. Boyarin, *Borderlines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004), 1–20 and 202–20. However, Boyarin's view accelerates the significance of the rabbis. Note, for instance, the 'exuberant diversity' of Jewish synagogue art in the same period, in spite of rabbinic pronouncements. See L. Levine, 'Contextualising Jewish art: the synagogues at Hammet, Tiberias and Sephoris', in Kalmin and Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture*, 91–132, esp. 130–1.

of Jewish myths to judge members of that community and demote 'non-rabbinic' forms of Judaism.<sup>10</sup>

More significantly, perhaps, than the Jewish examples, the Samaritan revolts provide the only example of political separatism in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>11</sup> The Samaritan community was persecuted by the Roman state, banned from building new synagogues, converting Christians or entering imperial service, and antagonised by the usurpation of their religious tradition: the claims of Christians to Old Testament history was given a physical form in campaigns to steal the bodies of Joseph and Eleazar from their sacred mountain at Gerizim.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, large numbers of Samaritans were also subjected to forced agricultural labour as the *coloni* of great Palestinian estates.<sup>13</sup>

The Samaritans resisted this pressure. They maintained the distinctiveness of their religion and religious display (using, for instance, a Palaeo-Hebrew script to adorn their synagogues) and producing internal laws for their communities to maintain endogamy, preserving their separateness in a Palestine dominated by Christians.<sup>14</sup> Moreover the Samaritans, recruited as part of Roman forces in Palestine, rose against Roman rule several times: in reaction to the theft of the bodies of the patriarchs; to the civil war between Ilus and Zeno; and to the threat of Persian invasion.<sup>15</sup> Though there probably was an element of class resistance to the rising of a Samaritan colonate, it is striking that the urban communities of Neapolis, Bethlehem and Caesarea, whose synagogue construction attests to their prosperity, co-operated with Samaritans from the countryside: Neapolis was seized in 529 and

<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, H. Lapin, 'Hegemony and its discontents: rabbis as evidence for provincial culture', in Kalmin and Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture*, 319–48 sees the rabbis as bearers of both an authenticating invented tradition and as a hegemony of legal specialists and landowners that was inherited from the high Roman empire.

<sup>11</sup> A complete narrative is given by A. Crown, 'The Samaritans in the Byzantine orbit', *BJRL* 69 (1986), 36–137, at 126–37.

<sup>12</sup> *CTh* 16.8.26; *Kitab al-Tarikh*, 52 (tr. Stenhouse, 236–9).

Summarised in Dauphin, *La Palestine byzantine: peuplement et populations* (Oxford: 2001), 286–7.

<sup>13</sup> *Chronicle of Zachariah of Mytilene*, 9. 8 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 232).

<sup>14</sup> Dauphin, *Palestine*, 127.

<sup>15</sup> *Kitab al-Tarikh*, 52; Procopius, *Buildings*, 5. 7 (ed. Haury, 3b. 165–7); Malalas, 15, 8 (ed. Dindorf, 384).

Caesarea in 556.<sup>16</sup> In both of the sixth-century cases, the Samaritans crowned emperor-messiahs, Justasas and Julian, who held chariot races in their conquered cities, the usurpation of an imperial symbol of rule whose only parallel in the period are the races held by the Persian shah Khusrau I at Antioch in 540.<sup>17</sup> The existence of internal legislation to defend that society's cohesion and the identification of that society for persecution by the entire Roman state imply that it was the best contender in the east Mediterranean to be an ethnē in both the cultural and political senses, with real aspirations to separatism.

Both Jews and Samaritans undoubtedly employed Roman cultural forms. The depiction of God as a solar deity in synagogue mosaics; the presence of Aphrodite in the patriarch's baths; teaching Homer in patriarchal schools; and the inspiration of churches upon synagogue construction have all been taken as instances of the submersion of Jewish culture in its Greco-Roman surroundings.<sup>18</sup> Similar arguments have been made for the use of Greek in funerary epigraphy (and for the epigraphic habit itself).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as Holum notes, it is striking that the Samaritans had no other image of rulership available to them than a Roman emperor, when they crowned their messiah at Neapolis.<sup>20</sup> But, like the heresiological tools that, Boyarin suggests, were borrowed by the rabbis from the Christians, the cultural creations of a Roman Christian world could be appropriated and used by Jews and Samaritans.

Thus, as late antiquity progressed, Jews and Samaritans were excluded from participating in Roman law and government, and it was in this exclusion that they (or classes of religious elites within them) invented and defended religious laws that demarcated them

<sup>16</sup> Malalas, 18, 35 (ed. Dindorf, 445–7).

See also Dauphin, *Palestine*, 289 and K. Holum, 'Caesarea and the Samaritans', in R. Hohlfelder (ed.), *City, Town and Countryside in the Early Byzantine Era* (Boulder, 1982), 65–73, at 65.

<sup>17</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 2. 11. 31 (ed. Haury, 202).

<sup>18</sup> M. Goodman, 'The Jewish image of God in late antiquity', in Kalmin and Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture*, 133–48; Levine, 'Patriarchs', 2; Levine, 'Contextualising Jewish art', 101; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 230.

<sup>19</sup> C. Heszer, 'Jewish literacy and writing', in Kalmin and Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture*, 149–96, at 172–7 and 190. She also notes that Diaspora Jews were often the epigraphic trend-setters in the port cities of Palestine.

<sup>20</sup> Holum, 'Caesarea', 72–3.

from their surroundings and built synagogues that defined their communities against the surrounding Christian settlements.

However, even the earlier disappearance of Jewish identity in 100–350, of the kind that was reflected in archaeology and epigraphy, was small relative to the other peoples of client kingdoms of the Near East. While the identities of states such as Chalcis or Minor Armenia vanished without trace, Jewish sites provide the only cases of non-Greek epigraphy in this period in the Palestinian and Syrian provinces, despite the atrophy of any independent ‘Jewish society’.<sup>21</sup> Even if they were peripheral to the lives of most Jews, rabbis continued to practise the trilingual culture of first-century Judaism, taught the Mishnah in schools and, like many non-rabbinic Jews, preserved a non-Roman vision of history in the Bible.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for Fergus Millar, Jews are the great exceptions to the ‘historical amnesia’ of the peoples of the Near East under Roman rule, a process exemplified by the disappearance of Aramaic inscriptions and writing and indigenous cults.<sup>23</sup>

### Ethnies in Syria: Palmyra and Edessa

However, for the period before Christianisation, there are regional caveats for Millar’s model in the survival of the Aramaic language on the edges of the Roman and Persian worlds. The city of Palmyra, the centre of a major revolt under Zenobia against the Roman empire in the third century, employed bilingual monumental and tomb epigraphy in Greek and Palmyrene.<sup>24</sup> And the language is also attested in the funerary epigraphy of legionaries serving as far away as Britain, suggesting that the written language was a vehicle of identity for its users when they travelled to other provinces.<sup>25</sup> Palmyrene, in its distinctive script, provided a symbol of power and an elite form of display that was distinctive to the city, as well as providing a language

<sup>21</sup> Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 106–7.

<sup>22</sup> Millar, *Near East*, 377–82.

<sup>23</sup> Millar, *Near East*, 470.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Stoneman, *Palmyra and its Empire: Zenobia’s Revolt against Rome* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> Brock and Taylor, *Hidden Pearl*, 1. 136 and Millar, *Near East*, 319–36.

for trade on the boundaries of the empire. But, as Millar notes, we have no reason to assume that this distinctive expression of Palmyrene was connected to separatism: the revolt of Zenobia was expressed using Roman ceremonial form and was aimed at imperial rule, a traditional bid for power by Roman elites.<sup>26</sup>

Roman Mesopotamia provides rather different examples of the independent use of an Aramaic dialect. The area was only annexed under Severus in 214, and given brief independence once more in 235–7.<sup>27</sup> Before this point it had been one of several buffer states that separated the Roman and Parthian empires, and was ruled under an independent dynasty with connections to the desert tribes. As H. J.-W. Drijvers has noted, it shared a pagan culture with the cities of Hatra, Harran, and to a lesser extent Palmyra, rather than looking to the cults of the Roman world, and its mosaics embrace a ‘Parthian’ artistic style of frontal representation that does not follow Greco-Roman trends.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, it is notable that tombs for the Jewish population received Syriac inscriptions, even though these were written in Hebrew script.<sup>29</sup> Syriac functioned as a *lingua franca* and language of prestige for different communities within the city.

Yet this Syriac-speaking area was also part of a post-Hellenistic world. The city of Edessa had been a Seleucid refoundation and its kings issued coins in the second century with Greek as well as Syriac legends and, after annexation, the immediate use of accurate Greek inscriptions might imply that it was already a familiar and comprehensible language of power.<sup>30</sup> Greek terms pepper the *Acts of Shmouna, Guria and Habib*, the earliest martyr-acts written in the city, and the Edessene theologian Bardaisan wrote in a Hellenised milieu of Middle Platonism, as well as engaging with debates on astrology.<sup>31</sup> Thus Edessa was a client state, where Greek and Syriac

<sup>26</sup> Millar, *Near East*, 336.

<sup>27</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 14–15.

<sup>28</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980); id. ‘Syriac culture in late antiquity: Hellenism and the local’, *Mediterraneo Antico* 1 (1998), 95–113, at 95.

<sup>29</sup> D. Noy and H. Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Iudicae Orientis*, 3 vols. (Tübingen, 2004), 3. 128–31.

<sup>30</sup> F. Millar, ‘Il ruolo del lingus semitiche nel vicino oriente tardo-romano, V–VI secolo’, *Mediterraneo Antico* 1 (1998), 71–94 at 73 and Segal, *Edessa*, 30, n. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Millar, *Near East*, 487; Drijvers, *Bardaisan*; Drijvers, ‘Syriac culture’, 104–6.

were both employed in tomb inscriptions and in legal documents.<sup>32</sup> The Beth Phouria cache from near Edessa illustrates the persistence of Syriac literacy despite the administrative use of Greek after annexation, since Greek documents are signed by witnesses in Syriac.<sup>33</sup>

By the fourth century, Edessa had become unusual among the cities of the Near East, both for the survival of its local culture and the mix of foreign cultures that it hosted. The cities of Hatra, Assur, and Palmyra, that had possessed similar pantheons of pagan gods and their own Aramaic scripts, had been destroyed or declined by the start of the century.<sup>34</sup> Edessa was part of a Greek-speaking Roman world, placed on trade routes with the Parthian and later Sasanian worlds. As in Edessa's fellow border-city of Palmyra, both cultures may have provided inspiration in the political posturing of the city's elites.<sup>35</sup> For instance, one of the courtiers of Abgar the king in the *Doctrina Addai* is named Peroz bar Patriq, a blend of Persian and Roman onomastics that testifies to the blend of cultural influences in the city.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this position on the crossroads of the empires was accompanied by the continued use of the city's distinctive dialect and script of Aramaic, which could not be found further south or west, in areas where other Aramaic dialects may still have been spoken but were no longer written.<sup>37</sup>

The fifth and especially sixth centuries saw the spread of Syriac epigraphy and writing west of the Euphrates, into the provinces of Syria and Palestine, though these are mostly in a monastic context and Greek inscriptions remain the majority.<sup>38</sup> What does this appearance of Syriac inscriptions in an area formerly monopolised

<sup>32</sup> Drijvers, 'Syriac culture', 98.

<sup>33</sup> S. P. Brock, 'Greek and Syriac in late antiquity', in A. Bowman and G. Woolf (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), 2. 151.

<sup>34</sup> Drijvers, *Cults*.

<sup>35</sup> Both Abgar the Great and Odenathus, rulers of Edessa and Palmyra respectively, were called by the Persian appellation 'king of kings' in local inscriptions. Stoneman, *Palmyra*, 74 and Segal, *Edessa*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 40).

<sup>37</sup> Millar, 'Lingue semitiche', 80–1.

<sup>38</sup> K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London, 2003), 286 and M. Mango, personal communication. Future sureys might reveal similar trends in Sasanian Mesopotamia.

by Greek inscriptions mean? I suggest that we are witnessing the evolution of Syriac into the high dialect of numerous different Aramaic dialects already spoken in these regions. Epigraphy does not indicate what languages were spoken by people without access to urban politics. But it does show the relative importance of Greek and Syriac as languages of political and religious power: the gradual appearance of Edessene Aramaic west of the Euphrates in the fifth century shows that the language was acquiring a new niche that allowed it an epigraphic identity.

The appearance of Syriac inscriptions in an area where many spoken dialects of Aramaic were already attested in literary sources coincided with the adoption of Greek loan words and forms into the language. Brock ties these two processes together: the use of Syriac by, and for, a broader population, which had had a longer experience of a Greek-speaking state, resulted in accelerated acquisition of Greek terms in Syriac.<sup>39</sup>

Simultaneously, Syriac seems to have displaced the use of other Aramaic scripts as well as the writing or speech of other dialects. Aramaic is unusual in that it has historically adopted numerous different scripts. The Jews of Edessa writing on their tombs, the Manichees and Mandaeans writing on their incantation bowls, Palmyrenes, Nabateans and Hatrans writing monumental inscriptions in their cities and the handful of documents written in 'Christian Palestinian Aramaic' all used different scripts to write languages that could differ substantially or, as in the case of Palestinian dialects, be very close indeed.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in the fifth and sixth centuries, Syriac provided a form of expression alongside Greek for the Aramaic-speaking populations of Roman Syria. This is a process can be tied to Christianity. Edessa is identified as a missionary centre both by the stories in Syriac, such as the *Doctrina Addai*, and by Sozomen.<sup>41</sup> And Edessa was probably the

<sup>39</sup> Brock, 'Greek and Syriac', 159; S. P. Brock, 'Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek', in *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), II.

<sup>40</sup> Brock and Taylor, *Hidden Pearl*, 2. 244–5.

<sup>41</sup> Sozomen, *HE* 2. 8. 2 (eds. Bidez and Hanson, 68). Sozomen was no uncritical recipient of propaganda, since he was keen to deny Edessene originality in other areas, such as hymnography, though it is possible that another Syriac-speaking city nearby, such as Adiabene, was the initial missionary centre (Murray, *Symbols*, 4 and 7).

site of the direct translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Syriac by Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>42</sup> This early role for Edessene missionaries and translators, and the production of texts suited to proselytism such as Tatian's *Diatessaron*, might have given Syriac its prestigious role as a Christian language and, potentially, have spread ascetic customs peculiar to the city of Edessa to a wider area. In the same way that Manichaean missionaries devised a distinctive script to set apart their writings from others, so the script and language of the city of Edessa acquired this role for Christian communities in Roman Syria and also for the Sasanian empire.

Greek had been the language of religious prestige as well as political power in the conversion of Anatolia and northern Syria. Trombley has observed how Homeric names, Greek literacy and Christianity all appear at the same time in the funerary epigraphy of Laodikea in Phrygia, and, in the fourth century, Greek was used to proclaim the religion of villagers of the Aleppine massif, of the Hauran and Umm el-Jimal.<sup>43</sup> Even in Nisibis we find the use of Greek to dedicate the baptistery built in 359. An inscription from the cathedral doors reinforces an image of Greek as the chief language of Christianity. But the flanks of the door also preserve an inscription in Syriac, alongside more informal Greek inscriptions, which speaks of a church translator, implying that a Greek liturgy was translated for the congregation.<sup>44</sup> This would certainly appear to be the case in Aramaic-speaking Palestine, where the Latin pilgrim Egeria records that the liturgy would be said in Greek by the priest and then translated into Syriac for the population at large.<sup>45</sup>

However, for our purposes it is more important that Edessa was *believed* to have been a missionary centre and Christian centre of longstanding importance.

<sup>42</sup> M. Weitzmann, *Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (London, 1996), 217–18, 221, 225–7 and 245–6.

<sup>43</sup> Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2. 102–4 and Millar, 'Lingue semitiche', 165. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, vol. 2, discusses the process of Hellenisation and Christianisation more generally for all of Anatolia.

<sup>44</sup> My thanks to David Taylor for an opportunity to see a photo of this inscription. A date of the fourth or fifth century seems likely. See also the original sketch by F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1911–20), 2. 360–3.

<sup>45</sup> *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 47 (tr. Wilkinson, 163).



So Syriac, in the fourth century at least, lacked religious prestige in the eyes of some. Jerome presents a possessed Frankish officer and a Bactrian camel speaking in Syriac, and Theodoret reports the Devil's attempts to plead for the Marcionites in the same language: for them Syriac was part of the texture of a barbarian world, where Greek was not understood and where the presence of demoniacs marked the frontier with the ordered world.<sup>46</sup> Yet Syriac avoided the fate of the minority languages of Anatolia: it spread to the south, east, and west and evolved a niche as a chosen language of Christian expression. It emerged as a prestigious means of expression, alongside Greek, for the once-peripheral Aramaic-speaking communities who receive new attention in fifth-century sources.<sup>47</sup> Its success might be explained by the importance of the school of Edessa as a centre for translation of works in Greek and the popularity of Syriac prayers and liturgy, by which Syriac was able to provide an attractive vehicle for Aramaic-speakers to engage with Christian theology.<sup>48</sup>

The spread of Syriac as a prestige language west of the Euphrates testifies to the influence of Edessa as a missionary centre. This early role may also account for the spread of ascetic practices, such as the 'bipartite' asceticism that was discussed in Chapter 2, into the provinces of Syria, which necessitated Theodoret's rewriting of the Mesopotamian founders of his Syrian ascetics. Moreover, the same processes seem to have been at work in the Church of the East, which

<sup>46</sup> *Life of Hilarion*, 22–3 (ed. PL 22, cols. 39–40); HR 21.15 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 2. 94).

<sup>47</sup> e.g. Chrysostom's concern for Aramaic-speakers coming to Antioch for baptism. *Baptismal Catechism*, 8. 4 (ed. Wenger, 249). Syriac's eclipse of other Aramaic dialects can be compared to the creation of a single 'correct' written form out of many dialects, which had previously existed in an oral continuum. Gellner (*Nations*, 62) suggested it was an important feature in the creation of the nation, whether this is effected through the English of Cranmer's Bible or in Luther's High German.

<sup>48</sup> On the schools of Edessa and Nisibis, see A. Becker, *Devotional Study: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Princeton, 2006). Edessa was the great centre for the production of Syriac manuscripts and remained so until after the Arab conquest. See W. Hatch, *An Album of Dated Syriac Manuscripts* (Piscataway, NJ, 2002) and M. Mango, 'Patrons and Scribes Indicated in Syriac Manuscripts, 411 to 800 AD', in *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress III/4* (Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik 32,4; Vienna 1982), 3–12. On the early awareness of a liturgical tradition in Syriac see Murray, *Symbols*, 21.

shared the ascetic practices and language of the Edessene church and whose Edessene origins were remembered. This is visible in the *Acts of Mar Mari*, which will be examined in the next chapter, and in Sozomen, who notes the conversion of Persia from Osroehene, and groups together the churches of Edessa, Syria I and II, and Persia, possibly as a results of their shared history, language, and customs.<sup>49</sup>

However, as Millar has reminded us in the case of Palmyra, differences in language and ascetic behaviour do not constitute a wish to operate outside the Roman world. As the history of the Roman Principate shows us, linguistic heterogeneity does not equate to a wish for separatism. Similarly, the distinctive ascetic practices that were commented upon in the hagiography of Theodoret and the legislation of Rabbula did not indicate that there was one Syriac Christianity that we can contrast with 'Roman Christianity'.<sup>50</sup> Instead we should focus on these features, of distinctive language and religious practice, as *potential* boundaries, that could become significant to delineate an Edessene or a Suryaya population within a certain territory, and could be asserted by certain authors, who set parameters for the behaviour of that population. As we will see in the texts analysed in the following chapter, linguistic and religious differences, a sense of territory, and local history could all be tied together, in different ways, to create different models for a culturally independent ethnies, living in or alongside the Roman empire. Where Christianisation had sliced the institutional and cultural pathways that allowed Jews to be both Jews and Romans, the missionary expansion of Edessa's language and ascetic practices had prepared the ground for expressions of culturally independent ethnies, who still remained orthodox Romans, but who could use their increasing prestige within the political and ecclesiastical arena of the Roman world.

<sup>49</sup> Sozomen, *HE* 2. 8 and 6. 33–4 (ed. Bidez, 68 and 289–91).

<sup>50</sup> Millar, 'Lingue semitiche', 72.

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## Edessa and Beyond: The Reception of the *Doctrina Addai* in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries

The critical question in terms of the self-definition of the peoples of Mesopotamia must be their view of their own history. A movement to produce indigenous histories was an important component of the great era of nationalism in the nineteenth century, a second phase that rode on the shoulders of earlier collectors of folk-lore and philology.<sup>1</sup> We might find a parallel in late antique Syria: if Syriac epigraphy, liturgy, and monastic rules show an awareness of the language's prestige and the existence of an independent ascetic tradition, then the production and elaboration of histories about those who shared this language and these traditions represents a second phase, in which multiple forms of identity were brought together as an ethnic.

In Mesopotamia, this second phase is epitomised in three texts that have previously been studied primarily for their theological content, or for what they tell us about the early history of the church: the *Doctrina Addai*, compiled in early fifth-century Edessa and the *Acts of Mar Mari* and the *Cave of Treasures*, mostly legendary accounts from Sasanian Mesopotamia that assert different forms of 'Suryaya' identity or connections to Edessene history.

<sup>1</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations*, 103–5; M. Hroch, 'From national movement to fully-formed nation: the nation-building process in Europe', in G. Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 78–97, at 78–81.

These texts provide distinctive visions of the histories of Syriac-speaking peoples, rooted in the missions of the apostles, the activities of partially remembered kings, the persecutions of pagan emperors and the history of Aramaic speakers in the Gospels: red-letter days that established a special destiny for a ‘Suryaya community’, however that might be defined. The fact that many of these histories got their facts wrong is itself confirmation that they saw the need to assert a different group identity for themselves as some kind of ‘Suryaya’ or Edessene people (even if this term Suryaya is not always used).<sup>2</sup> Who these ‘Suryaye’ were and how they came into being was imagined in very different ways, and this gives us a sense of the numerous directions in which Suryaye were being pulled in late antiquity. But amidst these varied and acephalous historical accounts there are assertions of distinctive history, ethnicity, language and religious practice that differentiated them from their neighbours. Instead of the historical amnesia that Millar observed for the second- and third-century Near East, these texts show us the resurrection and invention of histories to assert cultural independence.

## PART I

### The Abgar Legend

The first of these accounts is a composite collection of apocryphal stories that circulated in Greek and Syriac in the late fourth and early fifth century, the *Doctrina Addai*. This chapter will focus on the development of the Edessene stories about Addai and Abgar in the fifth century, before looking at their dissemination and significance beyond Edessa.

Following Griffith, I see the *Doctrina Addai* essentially as an early fifth-century composition, based upon the emphasis upon charitable giving, the use of the *Diatessaron*, and Cyrilline Christology and an

<sup>2</sup> Compare Gellner, *Nations*, 56. The term ‘Suryaya’ is first attested in the Syriac translation of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, produced in Edessa in 462, though earlier copies probably existed.

anti-Jewish bias which, considering the entire text, connect it with the episcopate of Rabbula (d.435), under whom all of these issues were contentious.<sup>3</sup> This is a dating drawn from the emphases of the text as a whole, but it is important to also remember that it is a compilation, drawing tales from a variety of sources. Some of these may date to third century polemics against the Manichees and concern places and protagonists from third- and fourth-century Edessa, while others of which are reworkings of propaganda stories and apocryphal tales written in Greek from elsewhere in the Roman empire.<sup>4</sup> So the *Doctrina Addai* is a compilation, whose constituent parts were gathered and altered according to early fifth century agendas, even though these parts retain echoes of earlier concerns.

A date of composition in the early fifth century places it just after the first dated Syriac manuscript that has been discovered, written in Edessa in 411. This manuscript included a martyrology, polemical works by Titus of Bostra and pseudo-Clement against heretics (the Manichees and Marcionites respectively) and Eusebius' works, *On the Theophany* and *The Martyrs of Palestine*.<sup>5</sup> This selection of early translations from Greek show us two of the major concerns of the Edessene church: the continuing need to combat long-standing rivals of Nicene Christianity, the Manichees and Marcionites, on the fringes of the Roman world and the importance of martyrs of the third century in the history and identity of the church.

<sup>3</sup> S. Griffith, 'The *Doctrina Addai* as a paradigm of Christian thought in Edessa in the early fifth century', *Hugoye* 6 (2003), 40 and, on the charitable emphases of Rabbula's episcopate, H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'Rabbula, The Man of God and the urban poor', in J.-W. Drijvers (ed.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient* (Leiden, 1999), 135–54. However, I am sceptical of the claims of J.-W. Drijvers, 'The *Protonike Legend*, the *Doctrina Addai* and bishop Rabbula of Edessa', *VC* 51 (1997), 288–315, at 305 for Rabbulan authorship for the *Doctrina* because of the text's support for the *Diatessaron*, even if it does share the bishop's interests in alms-giving, Christology, and anti-Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> For the anti-Manichaean levels of the text see H. Drijvers, 'Addai und Mani, Christentum und Manichaismus im dritten Jahrhundert', *OCA* 221 (1983), 171–85. A. Desreumaux, 'La Doctrine d'Addai: le chroniqueur et ses documents', *Apocrypha* 1 (1990), 249–68 at 261–7 and J.-W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, 1992), 152–62 discuss the apocryphal material circulating in Greek, variants of which became embedded in the *Doctrina*.

<sup>5</sup> Hatch, *Album*, 52.

But it is also reasonable to infer that this manuscript does not represent the first of such translations. Brock observes that Eusebius' *Theophany* would be a very unusual choice for the first translation of his work into Syriac: it seems likely that his much more famous *Ecclesiastical History* had already been translated.<sup>6</sup> This history, of the triumph of orthodoxy in the Roman empire culminating in the reign of Constantine, represents a third strand in the historical and theological concerns of the Nicene church in Edessa. These manuscripts show the importance of combating long-standing rivals to 'orthodox' Christianity on the fringes of the Roman world and the attraction of Edessa's own former king. We will see the same interests, of heresiology, martyrdom and the history of a Christian golden age reoccur frequently in the *Doctrina Addai* in its establishment of a distinctive Christian identity for Edessa, except that here the *Doctrina* back-projects all of these themes to the early history of the city and expands upon Eusebius' own portrayal of Edessa's former king, Abgar Ukama, as a forerunner of Constantine.<sup>7</sup>

The opening narrative of the *Doctrina Addai*, set in first-century Edessa, describes the conversion of the king Abgar V Ukama, a contemporary of Christ, by the apostle Addai, one of the seventy-two disciples. In this first part of the story, Abgar's envoy, the *tabularius* Hanan, encounters Christ in Jerusalem and returns to the king, bearing his portrait, which Hanan has painted, and tales of his miracles. Abgar immediately believes in the divinity of Christ and, because he is unable to enter the foreign territory of the Roman empire, he sends a letter to Christ requesting healing and offering sanctuary in Edessa, 'a small city that is big enough for two' (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܩܘܪܝܢܐ) from the Jews in Jerusalem. Instead of coming himself, the apostle Thomas dispatches Addai to the king.<sup>8</sup>

This correspondence between Abgar and Christ and the mission of Addai seems to represent a core tradition about the early history of Edessa, the so-called Abgar legend, variants of which had been reported in the fourth century in the account of the Latin-speaking

<sup>6</sup> S. Brock, personal communication. Our first manuscript for the Syriac version of the *Ecclesiastical History* is dated to 462. Hatch, *Album*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1. 13 (ed. Bardy, 1. 40–5).

<sup>8</sup> *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 1–7).

pilgrim Egeria and by Eusebius, who claimed to have seen the story in the archives of Edessa.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, this early section provided the most transferable feature of the *Doctrina*, and is employed in the introduction of an account of early missions in Mesopotamia, the *Acts of Mar Mari*.<sup>10</sup> This section, and its variants in other accounts, also includes the first references to the letter of Christ that would prove popular in sixth-century Greek versions of the Edessa conversion.<sup>11</sup>

These variations on the first section of the legend have attracted the majority of scholarly investigations of the text, chiefly aimed at the history of the early church in Edessa. In the early twentieth century, Burkitt argued that the myth of Abgar V's conversion refers in fact to a historical conversion under Abgar VIII, the penultimate independent king of Edessa, who was also the patron of Bardaisan and contemporary with the first recorded church in the city (which was mentioned in the *Chronicle of Edessa* after being damaged by a flood in 202).<sup>12</sup> This view was modified by Bauer, who saw the Abgar legend as an anti-heretical rewriting of the history of conversion, as part of a more general theory that saw early Syrian Christianity as heterodox, only to become orthodox under Qone, the city's first recorded bishop, in 313.<sup>13</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers has followed Bauer's theory of the rewriting of a heretical past. He has convincingly suggested that parts of the *Doctrina* are re-written Manichaean foundation accounts, noting the importance of painting in Addai's mission, the motif of the saint healing local princes that reoccurs in Mani's missions and the appearance of the name 'Addai' as one of Mani's immediate disciples.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 1. 13 (ed. Bardy, 1. 40–5). These variants are summarised in J. Tixeront, *Les origines de l'église d'Edesse et la légende d'Abgar* (Paris, 1888).

<sup>10</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari* 2–6 (Jullien and Jullien, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Tixeront, *Origines*, 56; Procopius, *Wars*, 2. 12. 5–34 (ed. Haury, 1. 204–9).

<sup>12</sup> *Chronicle of Edessa*, 10 (ed. Guidi, 3); F. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London, 1904), 19.

<sup>13</sup> W. Bauer, 1996, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, tr. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Mifflintown, 1996), 5 and 39–45; A. Mirkovic, *Prelude to Constantine* (Frankfurt, 2006), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Drijvers, 'Addai'. See Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 76 for the importance of princely patronage to Mani's mission.

I am not, for current purposes, immediately concerned with the historicity of the *Doctrina's* account.<sup>15</sup> It is more significant why an original story, whether fact or legend, was embellished and propagated so far into the fifth century. However, the similarities between Eusebius, Egeria, and the early part of the *Doctrina* do allow us to investigate the previously established tradition with which the fifth-century author-compiler was working and the additions he chose to make to this the original tale, which became the first section of the complete *Doctrina Addai*. Eusebius claimed to have taken his tale of the conversion of Abgar from the Syriac record in the city of Edessa and these claims are echoed by the scribal formula at the end of the *Doctrina Addai*, that names the text's creator as one Labubna, a previously mentioned figure at the court of Abgar.<sup>16</sup>

We cannot reject out of hand the idea that more of the *Doctrina* depends on an earlier text than merely that section quoted by Eusebius, i.e. it is possible that there was a real document in the archives or an oral tale, like that which was told to Egeria, which contributed more than the beginning of the *Doctrina*. But it is only in this early passage that we can test pseudo-Labubna's departures from the Eusebian story.<sup>17</sup> Tixeront mentioned three of these that are relevant to our purposes: the *Doctrina* makes Hanan, Abgar's emissary, a *tabularius* rather than a mere messenger; Eusebius renders Jesus' reply to Abgar as a letter, where the *Doctrina* has Jesus delivering an oral reply to Hanan, and Eusebius omits Jesus' promise to protect the city forever, which is preserved in the *Doctrina*.<sup>18</sup>

These emendations can be tied to the development of oral tales surrounding Abgar's correspondence with Christ towards the end of the fourth century. Egeria mentions being shown an image of Christ

<sup>15</sup> Here my analysis follows the path of Griffith, 'Paradigm'.

<sup>16</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 53) and Eusebius, *HE* 1. 13. 5 (ed. Bardy, 41).

<sup>17</sup> For the oral circulation of an early version of the tale see Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 19. See also his figure 1 for the hypothesised relationships between these lost early versions of the Abgar tale. S. P. Brock, 'Eusebius and Syriac Christianity', in H. Attridge and G. Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden, 1992), 212–34, esp. 228 also discusses the connections between the Abgar legends of Eusebius and the *Doctrina* and supports the story of an earlier Syriac version of the legend in the archives of Edessa.

<sup>18</sup> Tixeront, *Origines*, 46.



at Edessa and Hanan's role as the painter of this image has caused him to be elevated in status in the *Doctrina*.<sup>19</sup> The *Doctrina* does not follow Eusebius and Egeria in presenting Christ's reply as a letter, but the idea of Edessa as an invulnerable city would become associated with the presentation of a real letter or inscription on the city walls in a sixth-century variant of the *Doctrina* and in the sixth-century Edessene *Julian Romance*.<sup>20</sup> The early written form of the *Doctrina* shows us one stage in an evolving tradition, in which the idea of a protective formula was becoming popular, but when there was not yet a publicly displayed letter in Edessa, a reality that would have to be included in the story of Christ's message to Abgar. The *Doctrina* merges two developing versions of the Abgar legend, one of which emphasised the protective formula of Christ's letter, while the other drew pilgrims such as Egeria at the end of the fourth century with tales of an image of Christ.

Thus the Abgar legend was not the creation of the author of the *Doctrina*, but an older text, possibly originating in a document found in the archives of Edessa. Eusebius may have seen Abgar as a prototype for the conversion of Constantine, a claim that would have given Edessenese special claims to prestige and apostolic precedence, especially after Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* was translated into Syriac. A symptom of this growing prestige is the presence of the pilgrim Egeria, who seems to have been informed of Abgar's correspondence while in the city. The Abgar legend in the Syriac *Doctrina Addai* represents another stage in an evolving tradition, where a tale that had been used in Eusebius' image of Constantine was embellished to promote local interests, creating the myth of the city's invulnerability and provided a previously established core for other material, which was drawn from other sources and invented by the compiler.

### A Religious Paradigm in the *Doctrina Addai*

Edessa's prestige and tales of its invulnerability grew gradually through the fourth century and this process changed the version of

<sup>19</sup> *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 17–19 (tr. Wilkinson, 130–6).

<sup>20</sup> Tixeront, *Origines*, 56.

the Abgar legend that was employed in the *Doctrina*. But the *Doctrina* itself is ten times longer than the adapted Abgar legend, the text shared by the *Doctrina* and Eusebius. A pivotal moment for the invention of Edessene history must be the development of the earlier story into something much greater, that could encompass, challenge, and annexe the justificatory legends of other places, rework them and embed them into the apostolic history of Edessa.

As Griffith has emphasised, rather than focusing on its questionable historicity, the Abgar legend can be seen as a vehicle, a widely acknowledged and popular story to which other tales could be attached. These included the doctrine-laden sermons of the apostle Addai, which have been described as a paradigm for Christian behaviour in late antique Edessa, and the rewriting or embedding of apocryphal tales in Greek, such as the discovery of the cross by Helena, reworked in Syriac as the *Protonike Legend*, and the correspondence between Pilate and Tiberius, which is re-worked as a correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius.<sup>21</sup>

After the conclusion of the Abgar legend shared by Eusebius and the *Doctrina*, the *Doctrina's* narrative continues as follows. After Abgar has complained that he cannot dispatch an army into the Roman empire to kill the Jews, Addai heals Abgar and preaches to him, in a sermon that emphasises the need to spread Christianity to the whole world and to avoid heresy, and that uses a Cyrilline Christology ('Christ humbled his sublime divinity in his body').<sup>22</sup> Addai then tells Abgar the Protonike tale, a rewriting of Helena's discovery of the cross that makes it contemporary with the Abgar V in the reign of Tiberius and Claudius and adds an anti-Jewish slant to the legend.<sup>23</sup>

The narrative continues with a list of the nobles present, who rejoice at Addai's sermon and ask for it to be proclaimed publicly after one of them has been ordained.<sup>24</sup> His subsequent speech to the people is filled with invective against local pagan cults and the Jews, as well as more disguised attacks on Manichaeism and Marcionite

<sup>21</sup> Griffith, 'Paradigm', esp. 21–2.

<sup>22</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 7–10).

<sup>23</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 10–17).

<sup>24</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 18).

theology, such as an emphasis on the resurrection, as opposed to Manichaean reincarnation, and on the role of the Jewish prophets as symbols of the Old Testament, in contrast to the Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> After this, Abgar and all the citizens convert to Christianity and the king builds a church for Addai and presents gifts for his mission. Addai then answers the Christological questions of some of the nobility and the old pagan priests overturn their altars.<sup>26</sup>

Next Addai trains his successors, emphasising the ascetic conduct of the priesthood as well as knowledge of the scriptures and they read the Diatessaron to the people.<sup>27</sup> Abgar then corresponds with the king of Assyria, and sends him a report of happenings in Edessa, and petitions the emperor Tiberius to destroy the Jews in Judaea, which leads to a pogrom of Jewish princes.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Addai, on his deathbed, ordains his successor Aggai and tells the nobility that they must preserve the true doctrine that he has laid down.<sup>29</sup> It is only in the next generation that Manu bar Abgar returns to paganism and kills Aggai, forcing his successor Palut to go to Antioch for ordination at the hands of the patriarch Zephyrinus, in a final device that allows for the existence of antique paganism in Edessa while maintaining the apostolic origins of Christianity in the city.<sup>30</sup>

Thus much of the text is filled with the sermons given by Addai in Edessa, whether to the nobility or to the people at large. The context of the apostolic mission to the city legitimates the doctrines and imperatives for church conduct set out here. Christianity is presented as a middle path between pagans and Jews. The pagans that are

<sup>25</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 19–31). See A. Desreumaux, *L'histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Paris, 1993), 76–7, n. 77.

<sup>26</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 32–4).

<sup>27</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 35–6).

<sup>28</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 37–9).

<sup>29</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 39–48).

<sup>30</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 51–3). The apostolic succession from Addai to Palut may connect the *Doctrina* to an already present figure in the Edessene church (Segal, *Edessa*, 81). As Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 73 observes, this persecution is modelled on that of Julian in 360–3, when he ordered Christian priests to resume their former professions, since Aggai is martyred for refusing to return to his former profession as a tiara-maker and make a crown for Manu.

For antique paganism in Edessa see Drijvers, *Cults*, esp. 175–96.

identified are the cults of Harran, Mabbug and ‘the Arabs’, who worship the Eagle, a deity also venerated at Hatra.<sup>31</sup> The elucidation of arguments against pagans, such as the injunction to worship the creator rather than created things, and on the divine creation of astral bodies implies the continued importance of pagan–Christian debate at the time of writing.<sup>32</sup> The juxtaposition of these arguments with the ‘foreign’ origins of these cults helps to ‘other’ them and to create an image of a Christian Edessa, reliant on Christ for its protection, in which paganism can be presented as an alien influence.

Moreover, Addai’s sermons and actions function as a model for the correct behaviour of the church in the era in which the *Doctrina* was compiled—the apostle’s behaviour and his instructions to his successors could be modelled on the compiler’s view of correct behaviour in the present. His missions to foreign lands, the letter to the king of Assyria, and Addai’s report of the Pentecost emphasise both the church’s duty to spread Christianity and refer to Edessa’s precedence in lands further east as a missionary centre for Assyria.<sup>33</sup> And his instructions to the priests set up an ideal, in which they should ‘keep their bodies pure in order to act as priests of God’, sentiments that may reflect ascetic trends in Syrian Christianity deep into late antiquity. Additionally pseudo-Labubna devotes a section to the *bnay qyama* as a part of the church of Aggai, who help the poor and sick within the community while living ‘alone and chaste (ܒܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܥܘܬܐ)’<sup>34</sup> This precedent establishes asceticism as a rule for Edessene priests, and provided a yardstick by which to judge pseudo-Labubna’s contemporaries. But the author also defended the institution of the *bnay qyama*, a form of asceticism distinct to the churches of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Assyria, as a product of the church of Aggai, emphasising the orthodoxy of this distinctive institution in an era when Syrian ascetics could attract criticism abroad. The author tied

<sup>31</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 24). For ‘the Eagle’ of Hatra see Drijvers, *Cults*, 41–2.

<sup>32</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 25). This section could be as late as the fifth century, the suggested date for the creation of the *Doctrina* compilation, for the *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 30), written c.506, notes the presence of pagan cult processions at Edessa in 496–8.

<sup>33</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 21 and 35). Also see Griffith, ‘Paradigm’, 14 and later discussion of the situation in Babylonia and Assyria in this chapter.

<sup>34</sup> *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 35 and 50).

the traditions of these other communities to the establishment of the *bnay qyama* in Aggai's Edessa.<sup>35</sup>

As well as giving instructions on behaviour, Addai also spells out proper doctrine and church hierarchy. The apostolic Christianity he represents is firmly embedded in the concerns of fifth-century Edessa: pseudo-Labubna uses the figure of Addai to criticise the theologians of the Edessa of his own day. In an era when Rabbula was attacking the use of the Diatessaron the compiler defended the use of the Gospel Harmony by mentioning it in Addai's teaching of his priesthood.<sup>36</sup> Still, the author takes a similar stance as Rabbula against the Antiochene Christology of the school of Edessa, by placing Cyrilline definitions of Christ into Addai's sermons.<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, pseudo-Labubna uses Addai to comment on the administrative politics of the church provided by the apostolic succession of the Edessene church from Palut, a bishop ordained by the patriarch of Antioch. Here, I suggest, pseudo-Labubna reconciled his account of Edessa's apostolic heritage with a previously popular tradition that saw Palut as the first orthodox bishop of Edessa (for instance, heretics accused Ephraem of being a Palutian, referring to the 'founder' of his branch of Christianity, recognised elsewhere as Nicene orthodoxy, in Edessa).<sup>38</sup> This connection to Antioch may also explain contemporary ecclesiastical units in mythical terms.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For suspicion of Syrians see Chapter 2. For the presence of the *bnay qyama* outside Roman Mesopotamia see Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6 (tr. Valavanolickal, 123–60) and Marutha of Maypherkat, *Canons* (ed. Vööbus, 119–49), dealing with the church in the Sasanian Empire. Marutha is discussed in J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224–632)* (Paris, 1904), 87–99. Also see, on the *bnay qyama* in Sasanian Mesopotamia in general, Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I. 184–209.

<sup>36</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 36). Also see Petersen, *Diatessaron*, esp. 43.

<sup>37</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 8) The Cyrilline features of the text are discussed in Desreumaux, 'Chroniquer et documents', 219–21. The manuscript variations, that substitute 'his body' for 'his humanity' at this point suggest that the Christological ideas expressed here were controversial. See Desreumaux, *L'histoire du roi Abgar*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 53).

## Guardians of Orthodoxy: The Apostolic Mandate of the Bnay Hire

The presence of Addai in the legend also allows the compiler to establish a paradigm for relations between church and secular elites. Priests are warned that they should aid princes and judges, and only reprimand them so that they can act alone in the future.<sup>40</sup> And Abgar gives donations such as a church building and funds for missions, though Addai piously refuses Abgar's attempts to make a donation to him as an individual.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the circle of nobles, the *bnay hire*, who surround Abgar are especially prominent in the text. They are present at the apostle's private sermon; they question him about theology; some of them become members of the priesthood and they are called upon to preserve authentic doctrine.<sup>42</sup>

These nobles are frequently listed, which suggests that these names were still significant for the author and that they were the ancestors of Edessene noble families when the text was compiled. The same lists of names are recorded for supporters of the apocryphal Edessene martyrs of the era of Trajan, Sharbil and Barsamya, and the names of two of the nobles in the *Doctrina*, Barsamya and Hanan, feature in a mosaic found in a cave near Edessa.<sup>43</sup> The labelled figures have been dated epigraphically to the early third century and surround a robed figure bearing a sceptre labelled Abgar bar Manu, whom, H. J.-W. Drijvers has plausibly suggested, is Abgar VIII. Notably these figures bear the pagan theophoric names and share the same styles of dress as the Arab nobilities of Hatra, Palmyra, and Petra. So the mosaic cannot be seen as proof of an actual conversion to Christianity by Abgar VIII and his court, but it does show that the *Doctrina* refers to real nobles in Edessa's third century past, and that they displayed themselves in the same

<sup>40</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 45–6).

<sup>41</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 33 and 38).

<sup>42</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 9, 18, 34 and 40–1).

<sup>43</sup> The appearance of these saints in Edessene *synaxaria* in 411 suggests and the reproduction of the same lists of aristocratic names imply they are roughly contemporary with the *Doctrina* and were produced in the same aristocratic circles. See Segal, *Edessa*, 82.

way as the pagan elites of other nearby cities.<sup>44</sup> Thus the *Doctrina* does not only establish a model for the role of Christianity in the running of Edessa, where secular elites and priests support one another, but invents a Christian past for real noble dynasties, presenting these established families as the guardians of Edessa's Christian identity.

Thus, in the terms of Shamsul and Barth, the *Doctrina Addai* created boundaries between Edessenes and outsiders and monitored those who claimed to be within those boundaries. The compilation is built upon on an established story, the Abgar legend, already popular through Eusebius' ecclesiastical history and its translations, which made Edessa an important Christian city from the first century. This already prestigious myth then became the vehicle for the sermon material of the fifth century compilation. This sermon material, which makes up most of the text, proceeds to draw divisions between true Christians and Marcionites, Manichees, pagans, and Jews and to set out criteria for Christian behaviour, especially an ascetic priesthood and the missionary role of the church. It sets out boundaries for orthodox Christianity and orders the practice of its adherents, establishes the *bnay hire* as the guardians of that orthodoxy, and distances contemporary Jews and pagans from the city's new Christian history, denying their claims to be real Edessenes and labelling them as devotees of foreign cults.

Importantly, the religious paradigms set out by the *Doctrina* all have a very local slant. The pagan cults that the text attacks are those of neighbouring Aramaic-speaking cities that shared the same pagan cults as Edessa. Paganism could then be identified as a Harranian or Arab practice, alien to a Christian Edessa. Similarly, an ascetic priesthood and the *bnay qyama*, that were a distinguishing feature of Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity, were identified as apostolic injunctions and could be traced back to the missionary success of the Edessene church. A Christian Edessa was made

<sup>44</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'A tomb for the life of a king. A recently discovered Edessene mosaic with a depiction of King Abgar the Great', *LM* 95 (1982), 102–20 (though see the criticisms of J. B. Segal, 'A Note on a Mosaic from Edessa', *Syria* 60 (1986), 107–10). M. Gawlikowski, 'The last kings of Edessa', in Lavenant (ed.), *VII Symposium Syriacum* (Rome, 1998), 421–9 esp. 427 suggests the mosaic represents a court in exile under Abgar VIII's grandson, Abgar bar Manu.

distinct not only from its pagan neighbours and from its own pagan past, but thanks to its ascetic emphasis, from other groups of doctrinally orthodox Christians as well. The *Doctrina* did not solely demarcate proper Christian practice, it gave local Christian practice special significance as apostolic Christian practice and used this to emphasise the city's prestige.

This signification of local religious custom and history was intertwined with assertions of antiquity for positions in contemporary debates. Thus the *Doctrina's* use of Addai's sermon material attempted to place conditions on being a Christian in Edessa, defining this by allegiance to the Diatessaron and Cyrilline Christology. And, critically, the text claims the close involvement of the *bnay hire* with Addai in the conversion of the entire population of Edessa, ranging across religions and the class structure. Here we see the text inventing a Christian history for all Edessenes, a template by which they could be judged; a mandate for the persecution of Jews, pagans, and heretics, and a guarantee of the invulnerability of this border city. Simultaneously, the text invented a Christian history for an already established group of elites, whose pagan past in the reign of Abgar VIII was whitewashed to become the guardians and judges of Edessene Christianity.

The sermons of Addai can be seen as an attempt by the *bnay hire* to attribute significance to selected aspects of Edessene religion and history that created an ideal model for all Edessenes and to manage the boundaries by which an Edessene ethnîe was defined. The cultural independence of Edessa, claimed through the elaboration of the city's apostolic history, was tied to the claims of these *bnay hire* for leadership.

### The *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*: a Different View of Fifth-Century Edessa

However, in the era of the formation of the *Doctrina*, the first decades of the fifth century, there were several models for Edessene local identity. Its most distinctive features that have been connected to the time, Rabbula and to the circle of the *bnay hire*, its opposition to the Jews, its Christology and its Christianisation of the earlier



aristocratic and the royal history of the city, are all ignored in a roughly contemporary saint's life, the *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*.<sup>45</sup> This text, that has not been the subject of a full study since Burkitt's book of 1913, makes Edessa's distinctive identity a major theme. This identity is created around the Syriac language, in opposition to the unruly troops of the Roman government, and around local martyr cults, who are different from those composed in the circle of the *bnay hire*. The Edessene identity found here is quite different from the apostolic history of an independent Edessa found in the *Doctrina*.

The *Life* is set in 395, during a historically attested invasion of Mesopotamia by the Huns. A fifth-century composition date seems likely, since the vagaries of war would affect Edessa much more keenly in the sixth century, by which time contemporary events would have overshadowed earlier strife on the border. Burkitt also notes that the author is approximately accurate in his identification of local officials, and claims to have received the story from an old 'paramonarius' at the shrine of the martyrs Shmouna, Guria and Habib. This suggests a terminus *a quo* of c.430.<sup>46</sup> Wars against Persia in 420–1 and 444, the heightened state of tension with Persia in the second half of the fifth century or the Anastasian war of 504–6, when troops were again billeted on Edessa, could have all precipitated the tensions with foreign troops that is described in the *Life* for the 395 conflict, situations that might have encouraged the writing of a text that blackened the reputations of military outsiders.<sup>47</sup>

The *Life* describes how Gothic forces were billeted on the city and kept inside for fear of military intrigue. A Goth, who remains unnamed throughout the *Life*, is billeted with one Sophia, a pious matron of the city, and her virgin daughter Euphemia. Angry and 'inflamed with passion' the Goth offers her gold, threatens and cajoles Sophia to give him Euphemia, which she finally agrees to do after he promises to settle nearby. The Goth marries her but breaks

<sup>45</sup> For the composition of the *Life* in Syriac see F. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth, with the Act of Martyrdom of the Confessors of Edessa*, (Oxford, 1913), 49–58.

<sup>46</sup> Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 57–8.

<sup>47</sup> E. Stein, *Histoire du bas empire*, (Paris, 1949/1959), 1. 279–81 and 291; 2. 28–31 and 92–101.

his promise when he is stationed elsewhere, at which point Sophia makes him promise to return Euphemia safely at the shrine of the martyrs Habib, Guria, and Shmouna.<sup>48</sup>

The Goth takes Euphemia to an unnamed city further west, where he reveals that he is already married and strips her of her fine garments, despite Euphemia's protests that he had promised to protect her before the martyrs, comparing herself to Joseph in the land of the Egyptians. The Goth gives her as a slave to his wife, who treats her cruelly, and she is unable to communicate with anyone 'for there was no one to speak Syriac with, except for the Goth who had learnt it in Edessa.'<sup>49</sup> Next, a son is born to Euphemia, who is recognised as the Goth's son by his wife and poisoned. In revenge Euphemia poisons the Goth's wife and is put in prison by her jealous relatives. Euphemia is only released from her predicament after praying to the martyrs of Edessa, who magically transport her to a church back in Edessa, where she recognises where she is on hearing familiar chanting. Thereupon, all the people of the city praise God, and the pious old women stay by the tomb of the martyrs praying.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Sophia and Euphemia are able to take revenge on the Goth when he is stationed once again in Edessa. Here he lies to Sophia about Euphemia, saying she is well. Sophia and Euphemia seize on this perjury and the bishop of the city, Eulogios, and the Roman *stratēlatēs*, Addai, put him on trial. Here Addai condemns him for ignoring 'the pure laws of the Romans, the just judgement of God and the covenant of the martyrs' and has him put to death.<sup>51</sup>

The saint's *Life* uses the well-established theme of the deceived bride and gives it a local resonance in opposition to the federate troops billeted on the city during the conflicts of the late fourth and fifth century. The Goth is characterised according to the barbarian stereotypes that we have already met in Chapter 1: he is angry and lustful, indicating a general absence of self-control, and is dehumanised by his lack of a proper name—the only named individuals are Sophia and Euphemia, the bishop, and the *stratēlatēs*. This characterisation of the

<sup>48</sup> *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*, 1–14 (ed. Burkitt, 44–51).

<sup>49</sup> *Life of Euphemia*, 15–19 (ed. Burkitt, 52–5).

<sup>50</sup> *Life of Euphemia*, 20–34 (ed. Burkitt, 55–64).

<sup>51</sup> *Life of Euphemia*, 35–44 (ed. Burkitt, 64–73).

Goth is supported by a professional distinction: the attraction of marrying him and the thing that sets him apart from the Edessenes, the gold that he has accumulated during his campaigns, is matched by his unreliability, since, as a soldier, he can be stationed elsewhere and the local community has no immediate control over his actions, barring the *deus ex machina* of saintly intervention.

In an environment where Edessenes did not provide their own armed forces, the citizens were vulnerable to the extortions of billeted troops, and the *Life* highlights these differences to buttress local solidarity against these outsiders.<sup>52</sup> The antipathy represented in the *Life* may not have been limited to Goths per se. Goths may have represented a suitable metaphor for all outsiders coming to the city and presenting different opportunities and dangers to its citizens. In this sense, the *Life* constructs a boundary against these outsiders, associating them with an alien moral code, profession, and language, who, despite their wealth, will harm Edessenes who fall into their clutches.

This distinction of Edessa against the outside world is anti-military rather than against the Roman state. The authorities are ultimately protectors of the city against the Huns, and Addai the *stratēlatēs* invokes Roman law alongside the Goth's oath on the saints when he executes him with the support of the local bishop. In this sense, the *Life* shows the benefits of membership of the Roman empire. These benefits are very different from the anti-Jewish interests that coloured the *Protonike Legend*, where we will see the effects of different centripetal interests upon sections of Edessene society. While the elite circles, in which the *Doctrina* was composed and added to, wrote in the context of imperial policy and theology, the more popular and fantastic saint's life, with its lack of theology and folkloric character, saw the advantages of Rome in unquestioned legal protection.

The *Life* has a sense of Edessene difference that is rooted in language: only locals can speak Syriac and to leave this parochial world is to tempt destruction. But this distinctive linguistic identity has no cultural or historical significance attached to it: the only political powers in the text are the Roman empire and its opponents,

<sup>52</sup> Other examples of extortion by federate troops in Edessa are given in the *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 94).

an indication of the ideological inertia of imperial rule even on the Mesopotamian frontier. This acceptance of Rome emphasises the *Life's* differences with the *Doctrina*: the *Doctrina* recalls the history of an independent Edessa; the continuity of its elites and the city's claim to be one of most prestigious cities of the Christian world because of its early conversion. The *Doctrina* plays on a historical sense that is barely shared by the saint's life, whose notions of a distinctive historical identity rely either on language or on the Diocletianic martyrs Habib, Shmouna, and Guria. In both texts there is a sense of ethnîe, of difference and self-identity rooted in distinctive territory, myths and symbols, but that in the *Doctrina* is both more developed and more elite-driven.

Given these two different versions of Edessene ethnîe, it is interesting to compare the different martyr cults employed as focuses for these assertions of identity. The *Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya* can be linked to the same circle of the *bnay hire* that produced the *Doctrina Addai*, since they share the lists of aristocrats found in the *Doctrina* and the cave mosaic.<sup>53</sup> These acts, set in the reign of Trajan, attack the same local gods attacked in Addai's sermon in the *Doctrina* and include an extensive sermon given by the martyrs before death.<sup>54</sup> Since they deal with the conversion of a pagan priest to Christianity and the subsequent martyrdom of that priest by the pagan Roman authorities, the text emphasises the internal solidarity of the city against the Roman empire and the long Christian history of its old elites and its civic identity. Since the names Sharbil and Barsamya only appear in the 411 synaxarion, we can reasonably suggest they are fourth- or early fifth-century inventions, and, because of the names used in the text, produced in the same circles as the *Doctrina Addai*.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, the martyrs whose shrine features in the *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*, Habib, Shmouna, and Guria, are recorded in a set of lives that Burkitt argues are much earlier than those of Sharbil and Barsamya. The simplicity of the accounts suggests an eyewitness: the lives lack the lengthy speeches of the *Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya*; they describe men of low station, a deacon and laymen from villages surrounding the city rather than Edessa itself and

<sup>53</sup> See Brock, 'Eusebius', 228.

<sup>54</sup> Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 1–22.

<sup>55</sup> See Segal, *Edessa*, 82.

only claim to have taken place under Diocletian.<sup>56</sup> As Burkitt notes, one would expect invented acts to have more fabulous content and sermon-like material, and to be set in the city of Edessa, the centre of their cult.<sup>57</sup>

So the oldest martyrs' cult in Edessa, dedicated to men from the *chōra* of the city, provides a focus for local identity in the saint's life. In this sense it is comparable to the development of local relic cults across all of the Roman empire: the relics are sites for the communal prayer of the citizens, where they demonstrate their devotion to their protectors, and the text gives a role to the custodian of the shrine, who hears Euphemia's story. Furthermore, the action of the martyrs themselves rewards the citizens' devotion and their covenant acts as a local guarantee of Roman law in the judgement of the Goth. The city in unity venerates the saints and their influence supports the activities and interests of the citizens, the bishop, and their governor.

These established cults, in the context of the assertions of Edessene endogamy and linguistic peculiarity, constitute a claim for an Edessene ethnē using symbolic material readily available to and inherited by the author. By contrast, the *Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya* and the *Doctrina* demonstrate a more proactive attitude to Edessene identity. Where the *Life of Euphemia* points out the continuing significance of a communal devotion in a time of trouble, the circle of the *bnay hire* created new histories for the city. The history of local martyrs was projected back into the reign of Trajan, perhaps reflecting the need to compete with the antiquity of other cults, and portrayed as an Edessene high priests rather than a village deacons, focusing the cult on the city and exonerating elite families involved in pagan cults that might have been remembered from previous generations. The *Doctrina* and the *Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya* avoided the unity of the city under the rule of Roman governors from the third century by appealing to an apostolic Edessene history that circumvented the more simple, popular devotion to Diocletianic martyrs that we see in this saint's life.

<sup>56</sup> *Acts of Habib*, 3; *Acts of Shmouna and Guria*, 3 (ed. Burkitt, 4 and 27).

<sup>57</sup> Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 19–25. Segal, *Edessa*, 82–6 concurs.

## PART II

### The Development of the Myth: The Protonike Legend and Anti-Jewish Polemic

Two further themes of the religious self-definition of the text are antipathy to the Jews and the missions of the church beyond Edessa. These themes illustrate the Janus-faced form of Edessene identity as expressed in the *Doctrina* and illuminate assertions of the cultural independence of Edessa, as well as its ties within the Roman and Sasanian worlds. On the one hand Edessa and its elites were engaged in debates within the Roman empire over the religious prestige of different cities and the relationship of Jews and Christians. On the other hand, the *Doctrina's* missionary claims in the Sasanian world provided an aegis for the evolution of local Christian histories and for an identity rooted in shared language, ascetic practice and supposed descent. These themes will be examined in the remainder of this chapter by looking at the mutation of the Abgar legend and the text of the *Doctrina Addai* after its initial compilation, turning first to the embedding of anti-Jewish vignettes set elsewhere in the Roman empire, the correspondence between Tiberius and Abgar, and the discovery of the cross by Protonike, into the *Doctrina Addai*.<sup>58</sup>

There is an anti-Jewish tone in the original compilation of the *Doctrina*.<sup>59</sup> In the Abgar legend, Jesus' praise of those, such as Abgar, who have believed in him without seeing him implies a criticism of the Jews who have imprisoned him, and Abgar himself shows a model of the behaviour of a Christian king by lamenting that he cannot send an army to punish the Jews because Jerusalem lies outside his kingdom.<sup>60</sup> Later, during his sermon to the people, who

<sup>58</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 10–17 and 38–9).

<sup>59</sup> I use the term 'original *Doctrina Addai*' to refer to the text before the embedding of the *Protonike Legend* and the Tiberius correspondence, which clearly interrupt the flow of the narrative and introduce new protagonists. There is no manuscript for this 'original' text, though the earliest manuscript we have for the *Doctrina Addai*, the early fifth-century London manuscript, lacks the *Protonike Legend*. See J.-W. Drijvers, *Helena*, 153.

<sup>60</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 4 and 6).

include Jews, Addai emphasises Christianity's Jewish origins, in the relevance of the prophets to the New Testament, and he counters the kinds of criticisms that might have been made by Jewish interlocutors, by stressing the Pentecost and the mission to all the nations and the need to convince sceptical men both by miracles and by citations from the Law.<sup>61</sup> He summarises his position at the end of his speech: 'we worship the same God as the Jews, whom they crucified and the pagans worship unknowingly' and on his deathbed tells the *bnay hire* to preserve the faith from the snares of the Jews.<sup>62</sup>

Christianity, while represented as a development of Judaism and aimed at Jews as much as Gentiles, is rejected by most of the recalcitrant Jews, who had a history of 'persecuting the prophets who came amongst them.'<sup>63</sup> Even when Addai goes to visit Tobias the Jew or is mourned by Jews at his death, these are indications of the *potential* of converting the Jews, thereby criticising those obstinate Jews who, in fifth-century Edessa, had still not converted, and whose culture seems to have been well known by the compiler.<sup>64</sup> These passages, which discuss the Jewish allies of Addai, can be understood in the context of fifth-century attempts to convert the Edessene Jews during Rabbula's episcopate, were produced in a time when a synagogue was appropriated as the cathedral of St Stephen, and when wider debates within the Roman empire about the status of Jews, that were effected through the law-codes and through the violent actions of imperial citizens.<sup>65</sup>

So the *Doctrina* provides a model of classical arguments against the Jews and a definition of Christianity against a Jewish other. Much of this is not surprising—we would expect Christian authors to delineate their religion against Judaism. Andrew Jacobs has emphasised the academic imperialism of Roman Christian writers upon Jews and upon Palestine. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* distinguished the good, proto-Christian traditions and knowledge to be gleaned from

<sup>61</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 19–21).

<sup>62</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 29).

<sup>63</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 43).

<sup>64</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 5 and 48). See Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 83, note 247 for the compiler's use of the terms of late antique, rather than first century, Judaism.

<sup>65</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'Jews and Christians in Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985), 88–102, at 93. For the confiscation of the synagogue see *Chronicle of Edessa*, 51 (ed. Guidi, 6).

the Old Testament while decrying the Jews of his day, while to the Bordeaux pilgrim, the Jews of Palestine only served as memorials to a pre-Christian past, rather than a living alternative to Christianity.<sup>66</sup>

But the absorption of Jewish history and culture by Christian intellectuals that Jacobs reports is, in part, a product of their Palestinian context, where Christians had come to a holy land already inhabited by Jews. The intellectual imperialism he reports is different from the casual, everyday anti-Judaism of Ephraem or from the *Doctrina's* vision of the Jewish past: for pseudo-Labubna, the Jews are not the people of the Old Testament prophets, but the people who rejected the prophets.<sup>67</sup> The anti-Judaism of the *Doctrina* reflects a milieu in which Christians and Jews might argue in a shared language over exegesis, and where the long proximity of Judaism and Christianity meant that the former continued to present a real lure to Christians, forcing Christian leaders to assert religious boundaries more starkly.<sup>68</sup>

Two vignettes that concern the treatment of Jews in the Roman world as a whole are embedded into the Edessene narrative of the *Doctrina*. They extend the anti-Jewish bias of the Edessene scenes into a model for imperial behaviour, where Abgar's complaints against the Jews are taken up by imperial figures who persecute the Jews in other Roman provinces. The inclusion of these vignettes, I suggest, transforms the *Doctrina* from being a comment on local Jewish relations to an attack on more tolerant attitudes to Jews seen in the Palestinian commentators and pilgrims, and in the law codes.

The first of these embedded vignettes was already present in the *Doctrina* when the London manuscript was written in the early fifth century, though it breaks the flow of the Edessene narrative, suggesting that the scene was added to the compilation after the writing of Addai's sermons but before our first surviving manuscript was

<sup>66</sup> A. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: the Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, 2005), esp. 29–30 and 109–17.

<sup>67</sup> A. Hayman, 'The image of the Jew in Syriac anti-Jewish polemical literature', in J. Neusner and E. Frierichs (eds.), *To See Ourselves as Others See Us* (Chico, 1985), 423–31, at 428–31, stresses Ephraem's imagery of the synagogue as a harlot and his hatred of the smell of the Jews.

<sup>68</sup> Drijvers, 'Jews and Christians in Edessa', esp. 98–100.



written.<sup>69</sup> It describes how Abgar wrote to the emperor Tiberius after hearing Addai's sermon and asks him to punish the Jews and to dismiss Pilate, which Tiberius does, killing the Jewish princes.<sup>70</sup> This story is taken from a second-century story later attached to the *Apocryphal Acts of Pilate*.<sup>71</sup> The development of the *Doctrina* took place in the context of the apocryphal literature circulating throughout the Mediterranean world. The story's setting in the *Acts of Pilate* was stripped away and a principle position given to Abgar, as a model petitioner to the emperor.

The second embedded vignette, the *Protonike Legend*, a variant of the *Helena Legend* was added later than the Tiberius correspondence. In the *Helena Legend* the mother of Constantine discovers the Cross in Jerusalem, whilst in the former the protagonist is the wife of the emperor Claudius, Protonike.<sup>72</sup> This legend existed in two forms, one of which was embedded within the *Doctrina*, while the other circulated independently only in Syriac and Armenian, without apparently being translated into Greek. The *Protonike Legend* first appears in the *Doctrina* in the early sixth-century Leningrad manuscript, but J.-W. Drijvers argues convincingly that the legend must have been embedded much earlier. He notes that another variant on the Helena legend, which circulated in Greek as well as the Syriac of its composition, the *Judas Kyriacos Legend*, is written as a sequel to the *Protonike Legend*, since it presents Helena's discovery of the cross as a rediscovery, after the initial success of Protonike. This *Judas Kyriacos Legend* had reached the attention of Sozomen in the 440s. Noting that the *Protonike Legend* was composed as part of the *Doctrina Addai*, and that it is absent from the London manuscript, he dates both the Protonike and Kyriacos legends to the period

<sup>69</sup> See Desreumaux, *L'histoire du roi Abgar et de Jesus*, 186.

<sup>70</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 38–9).

<sup>71</sup> The initial story is reported in Tertullian, *Apologia*, 5 and 21. The *Acts of Pilate* are first firmly attested in Epiphanius of Salamis' *De Haeresibus*, 50. 1 (written 375), though the letter to Tiberius seems to be a later addition. See discussion in W. Schneemelcher, (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., tr. R. Wilson (Cambridge, 1991), 1. 501–4 and 530. On the use of this apocryphal material in the *Doctrina* see A. Desreumaux, 'La doctrine d'Addai: essai de classement des témoins syriaques et grecs', *Augustinianum* 23 (1983), 181–6.

<sup>72</sup> Drijvers, *Helena*, 79–80 and 147–50.

c.400–440.<sup>73</sup> The former might be dated more precisely to the 410s because of a reference to fighting in Spain, which might reflect Vandal invasions in that decade.<sup>74</sup>

The *Protonike Legend* describes how the wife of the emperor Claudius discovered the True Cross in Jerusalem, anticipating the events of the *Helena Legend*. In it, Protonike abjures paganism after meeting Simon Peter in Rome, before travelling to Jerusalem and being greeted by James, brother of Christ. Here she learns that Golgotha, the True Cross, and Christ's tomb are all in the possession of the Jews, who persecute those who are trying to spread Christianity. Protonike commands their return and tests the three crosses for their miraculous powers by using one of them to resurrect her dead daughter. Next Protonike constructs a church at Golgotha, anticipating Constantine's construction and causing all the Jews and pagans of the city to be thrown into despair, before returning to Rome, where she persuades Claudius to expel all the Jews from Italy.<sup>75</sup>

The anti-Jewish features and Cyrilline Christology of the *Protonike Legend* make it in keeping with the rest of the *Doctrina*. These features clearly set it apart from the fourth-century Helena legend, which does not mention the Jews at all.<sup>76</sup> Here the *Protonike Legend* has reworked a popular Greek legend to fit the paradigms of the *Doctrina Addai* and the prejudices and needs of an Edessene audience.

Both the *Protonike Legend* and the Tiberius correspondence feature petitions to the emperor to persecute the Jews. This may reflect the ongoing tensions between imperial authorities and those independent monastic and ecclesiastical authorities that acted against the Jews in the early fifth century. The same issues seem to be at hand in a life of a contemporary saint, Barsauma of Samosata, who led his bands of monks and 'mountain people' across Palestine, a land of Jews and

<sup>73</sup> Drijvers, *Helena*, 152–62 and 173–4. On the legend of Judas Kyriakos see J.-W. Drijvers and H. J.-W. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac: Introduction, Text and Translation* (Leiden, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Griffith, 'Paradigm', 24. I. Ramelli, 'Possible historical traces in the *Doctrina Addai*', *Hugoye* 9 (2006), argues unconvincingly that the *Doctrina* describes first-century wars in Spain under Claudius.

<sup>75</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 10–17).

<sup>76</sup> J.-L. Feiertag, 'À propos du rôle des Juifs dans les traditions sous-jacentes aux récits de l'Invention de la Croix', *AB* 118 (2000), 241–65.

Samaritans, in the 420s–440s, destroying a luxuriant synagogue built by Solomon at Rabbat Moab and ambushing Jews in Jerusalem in spite of opposition from the imperial authorities and Palestinian Christians.<sup>77</sup> In Jerusalem he engaged in a public competition with the empress Eudocia, who banned him from further destruction, invoking the laws of 423 that prevented Jewish, Samaritan, and pagan places of worship from being attacked.<sup>78</sup> His response was an attack on her public piety in Jerusalem, highlighting her failure to give alms to the poor.<sup>79</sup> Essentially, the saint groups the empress with the Jews: her building project parallels the luxurious synagogue that Barsauma destroys, while the empress's pagan origins and her defence of the Jews are invoked to present her as a bad Christian.

A similar scene exists in the Syriac *Life of Symeon the Stylite*, where Symeon attacks Theodosius II, the husband of Eudocia, for his defence of the Jews in his legislation. The *Life* reports how a 'wicked adviser' caused an edict to be proclaimed returning captured synagogues to the Jews, causing Jews and pagans to dress in white and rejoice, and much distress amongst the Christians. After certain priests appeal to Symeon, he writes to the emperor saying, 'your heart is exalted and you have disregarded the Lord who gave you diadem and throne and become a friend to the Jews. Behold! The anger of God will overtake you'.<sup>80</sup> This scene has no parallel in the Greek versions of the life and this text, composed between 459, the date of the saint's death, and 473, the date of the surviving manuscript, may have been one of the first Syriac texts written west of the Euphrates.<sup>81</sup> Thus it is possible that the anti-Jewish motif of the text represents the interests of a Mesopotamian scribe or of his Aramaic-speaking audience in the region around Antioch.

The *Doctrina*, and the additional vignettes embedded within it, was compiled in the same era and region as the *Life of Barsauma of*

<sup>77</sup> F. Nau, 'Deux épisodes de l'histoire juive sous Théodose II (423 et 438), d'après la vie de Barsauma le Syrien', *Revue des études juives* 83 (1927), 184–202. E. Honigmann, *Le couvent de Barsauma* (Paris 1954), ch. 2 dates the final composition of the life to 550–650, but I suggest that the *Life's* presentation of the Jewish issue as a bone of contention between saint and empress reflects fifth-century conditions.

<sup>78</sup> Nau, 'Deux épisodes', 191.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 194.

<sup>80</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 121–2. (tr. Doran, 189–90)

<sup>81</sup> Millar, *Greek Roman empire*, 110.

*Samosata*. The *Doctrina*, like the Syriac *Life of Symeon* and the *Life of Barsauma* both present attacks upon recalcitrant Jews as an approved Christian activity, in contrast to the attitudes of the discovery of the cross in the *Helena Legend*, which does not mention the Jews, or the Theodosian legislation, which sought to defend them against violence.<sup>82</sup> Thus there were two sides to arguments about the treatment of Jews. The strand that Jacobs observed from his Palestinian texts and the imperial legislation, which sought to absorb and control contemporary Jews as symbols of the past, was accompanied by a more radical strand that advocated a more direct approach. For Barsauma and Symeon, though not for Eudocia and Theodosius, attacking synagogues could be an intrinsic part of orthodox behaviour. The stance of this hagiography is borne out by riots in nearby Tella, caused by Jews eating with Christians at Passover, and the massacre of Jews that accompanied the Persian siege of that city in 502.<sup>83</sup>

Thus the evidence suggests that anti-Jewish activity was an expected part of Christian identity, at least for some Syrian and Mesopotamian populations, and that, as such, it could form a reasonable focus for *Kaiserkritik*, i.e. that discrimination against the Jews was an expected part of good Christian government. An anti-Jewish stance would become increasingly important in the laws and behaviour of the emperors: in a gradual process stretching from the banning of Jews from civic honours in the novel of 439, through to mob violence against Jews in the reigns of Leo and Zeno (which potentially carried official support) and the anti-Jewish legislation of Justinian.<sup>84</sup> But even then, hagiographers might take emperors to task for failing to discriminate harshly enough against the Jews, a field in which Syrian ascetics and polemicists had a long pedigree of activity.

Like the saints' lives, the *Doctrina* presented a Mesopotamian image of the relationship between Jews and Christians that opposed the intentions of the law-makers. The *Doctrina* presents Abgar both

<sup>82</sup> Feiertag, 'Invention de la Croix'; *CTh* 16. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Millar, *Greek Roman empire*, 20; *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 58).

<sup>84</sup> Nau, 'Deux episodes', 200; *JNov* 3, 131 and 146; *CJ* 1.5.12-3; *Chronicle of Malalas* 15 (ed. Dindorf, 390). The anti-Jewish legislation of the fifth and sixth centuries is summarised by Dauphin, *Palestine*, 297-301.

as a Christian monarch trying to do his duty and persecute the Jews and, in the two embedded texts of the *Protonike Legend* and the Tiberius correspondence, as a Roman magnate petitioning his emperor to deal with the Jewish princes. Simultaneously, the emphasis on Protonike's devotion to Simon Peter emphasises that Addai's mission was part of the history of an orthodox church that had always acknowledged Roman primacy and continued to do so in the fifth century.<sup>85</sup> Thus the compilation can be seen as part of a wider movement that opposed the more tolerant agenda regarding the Jews adopted by the Theodosian Code.

However, the embedding of the Tiberius correspondence and the *Protonike Legend* into the *Doctrina Addai* changed the way in which the text's anti-Jewish agenda was pursued. The compilation that preceded the anti-Jewish vignettes had presented an ideal of Christian rule through the figure of Abgar, who functions as a prototype of Constantine, prefiguring the conversion of the Roman empire in the city of Edessa alone. The text of the *Doctrina Addai*, without the Tiberius correspondence and *Protonike Legend*, is a source for the independent history of Edessa, in an era when Abgar is said to have converted before any other monarch and in which his aristocratic courtiers served as the repository for a pure faith, in belief and ascetic practice, which was not practiced in most of the empire.

The embedded anti-Jewish vignettes place Abgar into a Roman context. The original text presents Abgar threatening to invade Palestine, supervising the conversion of the people of Edessa, and receiving correspondence from the king of Assyria. But the embedded texts present Edessa not as an independent kingdom but as a client state of the Roman empire. While Abgar's rule is presented as a model for anti-Jewish action by the state in the original text, the embedded vignettes give this role to Roman imperial figures, to Claudius, Tiberius, and Protonike, who are made contemporaries of Abgar.

H. J.-W. Drijvers suggests that the later compilation of the *Doctrina*, with the *Protonike Legend* included, reflects a wish to tie together Edessa and Jerusalem and to create a history of Edessene co-operation

<sup>85</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 16).

with Roman emperors.<sup>86</sup> And Mirkovic proposes that the embedded texts reflect a pro-Roman move on the part of the later compiler, in an era when religious refugees from Persia prompted a closer identification of the Roman empire with the Christian world.<sup>87</sup> But the *Doctrina's* presence within wider debates about imperial action and attitudes to the Jews does not mean that it seeks to submerge an Edessene identity entirely within a Roman political world, but that Edessene ideas required a Roman history, that presented the city as an actor within the entire empire, in order to be persuasive.

The use of a Roman historical context for the anti-Jewish ideas in the two vignettes embedded into the *Doctrina* reflect the text's position in an empire-wide contest over the emperor's duties, especially those regarding the Jews, in an environment where part of the emperor's authority rested on a church in orthodoxy and at unity.<sup>88</sup> If this meant that provincial religious identity discussed its own past in terms of Roman history, as well as in on its own terms, then it was because its opinions could effect the actions of the centre: the ideals of orthodox rule provided a framework to criticise an emperor as well as support for his rule. Just as Barsauma had asserted a specific kind of religious conduct for Eudocia, the embedded vignettes of the *Doctrina Addai* did the same at one remove, using stories about Protonike, Tiberius, and Claudius to make suggestions for the behaviour of Theodosius II and Eudocia. The centripetal pull that Mirkovic correctly detected in the *Protonike Legend* also shows us the potential of certain kinds of religious pressure against the Jews in the fifth-century empire: arguments were phrased in terms of the Roman past in protest against contemporary state policy.

Yet these anti-Jewish arguments also emphasised the pious history of the city of Edessa, as opposed to the failure of contemporary

<sup>86</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'The image of Edessa in the Syriac tradition', in H. L. Kessler and G. Wolf (eds.), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (Bologna, 1998), 13–31, at 16.

<sup>87</sup> Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 53–66. These religious refugees do not seem to have cut their ties further east. Indeed, the presence of these, and other migrants into the Edessene entrepôt, may have encouraged continued contacts with churches in Sasanian Mesopotamia, which are reflected in cross-border debates about ecclesiology that used the *Doctrina Addai* and its variants. See below.

<sup>88</sup> For the importance of orthodox behaviour for emperors see Chapter 1.

emperors to enact proper Christian government: the inclusion of the new vignettes was simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal. The *Protonike Legend* shows us Edessa contesting the special claims of the dynasty of Constantine: by pushing the first discovery of the cross to the reign of Claudius, its author could emphasise the antiquity of Abgar's conversion and the antiquity of Edessene religious practice compared to other centres. The effectiveness of the reworking of the Protonike and Tiberius legends as models for contemporary anti-Jewish action by emperors relied on their use of a Roman past. Emperors' assertions of universal rule and the equation of the Roman empire with the Christian world provided a framework into which the compiler of the final text of the *Doctrina* could present Edessene history, but they did not exclude other claims to prestige using Christian history. The older parts of the *Doctrina*, which often preserve more accurate memories of an indigenous aristocracy, preserved the image of an independent, pre-Roman Edessa alongside that of the Tiberius correspondence and the *Protonike Legend*. The *Doctrina Addai*, after the inclusion of the anti-Jewish vignettes, remains a story about a pre-Roman past, except that now it emphasises Abgar's precedence over Constantine and uses Abgar as a model for contemporary Christian government.<sup>89</sup>

### The Acts of Mar Mari and the Oriental Missions

As well as generating images of the Roman past, the *Doctrina Addai* was also responsible for claims to authority and prestige within the churches of Sasanian Mesopotamia. Edessa's position on the borders of two empires and its (alleged) history of missionary activity afforded it a cultural independence, in which it asserted different claims in different political spheres.

<sup>89</sup> I am unconvinced by the attempts of A. Palmer, 'Prophet and king: Mar Aprem's message to the East Roman emperor', in G. Reinink and A. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.-W. Drijvers* (Leuven, 1999), 231–6 to locate the use of the figure of Abgar to criticise a Roman emperor a century earlier, in Ephraem's comments on Valens, which relies on forced readings of his texts.

A case in point for this independent history is the memory of the correspondence between Abgar and Narses, king of Assyria and the disciples 'made in the land of the Assyrians'.<sup>90</sup> Here the tale of a mission, whether real or invented, has been anachronistically blended with the memory of the late third-century shah, Narses, who had been a patron of the Manichees.<sup>91</sup> Mirkovic has argued that the adoption of Addai was a significant step in the Romanisation of the church of Edessa, noting that Ephraem and Egeria thought that it was Thomas who had been the evangelist of Edessa and do not mention Addai's tomb in the city.<sup>92</sup> For Mirkovic, Addai does not share the associations of Thomas with the church further east. But the memory of Abgar's correspondence with Narses seems to contradict this, since it points to the importance of a Manichaean connection for the use of the name Addai, a legend that was subsequently attached to the tale of the conversion of Mesopotamia by Thomas, and points to the importance of Edessa as a missionary centre for 'all Mesopotamia' for the compiler of the *Doctrina*.<sup>93</sup> It will be argued here that this legend was widely received in Mesopotamia and provided a shared structure for the foundation legends of different Christian communities.

A late sixth-century conversion story from the Church of the East, the *Acts of Mar Mari*, shows us the significance of the claims in the *Doctrina* beyond the city of Edessa.<sup>94</sup> The reworking of the Abgar legend and the appearance of numerous stories of royal conversion in the first century at the hands of the apostolic succession to Addai indicate the popularity of the *Doctrina* beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire and the significance of the claims to authority

<sup>90</sup> *Doctrina* (ed. Howard, 37).

<sup>91</sup> W. Seston, 'Le roi Narses, les Arabes et le Manichéisme', in *Mélanges Dussaud* (Paris, 1939), 230–8 at 230–4. The presence of Narses may reflect a layer in the *Doctrina* that was originally a Manichaean foundation myth, before its later Christianisation.

<sup>92</sup> Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 49–50. For the cult of Thomas and the blending of Thomas' reputation with that of Addai in the fourth and fifth centuries see Segal, *Edessa*, 65–6 and 174–6.

<sup>93</sup> For the emphasis on proselytism see *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 25–6, 34, 37).

<sup>94</sup> F. Jullien and C. Jullien, *Aux origines de l'église Perse: les Actes de Mar Mari* (Louvain, 2003), 108–11 date the text's final compilation more precisely to c.585, on the basis of the similar credal tone it takes to the synod of Isho'yahb I.



inherent in the *Doctrina* in the ecclesiastical politics of the sixth century. This story also highlights a flaw in Mirkovic's suggestion that religious persecution in the Sasanian Empire and the flight of these refugees to Edessa prompted the identification of the Roman empire with the Christian world. The continued variation on the *Doctrina Addai* east of Nisibis shows that Edessa's claims of authority and prestige, and wider contacts between Christians in general, were not dead. Even before then, there remained Christian groups within the Sasanian empire, who grew in importance in the fifth to seventh centuries and used Syriac as a liturgical language: the *Doctrina* was in dialogue with these communities, to whom the Syriac-speaking Roman citizen Marutha of Maypherkat was sent in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, as well as with Christian centres to the West.<sup>95</sup>

*The Acts of Mar Mari* describes the conversion of a series of kinglets in Assyria and Babylonia by Addai's disciple Mari, which is prefaced by the description of the creation of an image of Christ, later held at Caesarea, and an abbreviated version of the Abgar legend, which concludes with the dispatch of missionaries into Sasanian Mesopotamia rather than later events in Edessa.<sup>96</sup> The legend is far more than an elaboration of the Addai legend, since it also absorbs the local legend of Mesopotamian Baptist sects and builds upon previous tales of the conversion of local kings by Manichaean missionaries.<sup>97</sup> After Addai dispatches Mari to the series of many kingdoms of the future Sasanian empire, which, the text notes, filled the land of Persia 'before the reign of Ardashir' [the first Sasanian shah].<sup>98</sup> Mari then converts their rulers after performing various miracles and finishes his journey in Radan and Abad, villages on the site of the future city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, ordains a successor, Papa, by tradition the first bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and dies, leaving his body here to protect his chosen see.<sup>99</sup>

The multiple conversions of petty kings to Christianity after the healing of court members bears a close resemblance both to third-

<sup>95</sup> Winkler and Baum, *Church of the East*, 1–22.

<sup>96</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, esp. 1–7 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 1–17).

<sup>97</sup> For the incorporation of Dosithean and Manichaean stories see Jullien and Jullien, *Eglise Perse*, 27–40 and 81–90.

<sup>98</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 17 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 28).

<sup>99</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 30–3 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 42–5).

century Manichaean tales, especially the relationship between Mani and Shapur I, and to the healing of Abgar in the *Doctrina*.<sup>100</sup> Jullien and Jullien isolate a series of examples where cities are converted by disciples of the Christian Mari, who share the names of Manichaean missionaries reported in the third century. The *Acts* sometimes preserves Manichaean nomenclature for Mari, who seems, in places, a Christianised version of Mani himself. Thus he is referred to not only as ‘an apostle of Jesus Christ’, but also as ‘the last of the apostles’, an important theme in Mani’s message.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, these tales probably predate their juxtaposition to a tale involving Addai, since they discuss one Adda, the Manichaean missionary on whom Addai seems to have been based.<sup>102</sup>

I suggest that these local stories were embedded into a single Christian framework provided by the story of conversion from Edessa in the *Doctrina*. Even if the Abgar legend and the healings of the petty kings of Mesopotamia had shared origins in third century Manichaean tales, the tales of the kings of Arzon and Arbela, are almost identical to the Abgar legend, with the immediate conversion of king and people after a missionary heals his gout or leprosy (both diseases are said to have afflicted Abgar in different variants of the Abgar legend).<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the king of Arzon replies to Mari reproducing exactly Abgar’s reply to Addai.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the text also refers to Mari as a disciple of Addai, a description that oscillates with a view of him as an apostle in his own right.<sup>105</sup>

Mari is first attested in a letter of Ibas of Edessa, the Diophysite rival of Rabbula for the episcopate, in which he appealed to the Diophysite Christology of the missionary to Mesopotamia. The influence of this invention of history was observed in the sixth century by the Miaphysite missionary, Simeon beth Arsham, who blamed Ibas’ letter for the drift

<sup>100</sup> For accounts of Mani’s mission see Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 106–15. On the role of healing in Manichaean missionary tales see *ibid.* 70 and 105–6.

<sup>101</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 10 and 14 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 21 and 25).

<sup>102</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 14 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 25).

<sup>103</sup> See Tixeront, *Origines*, 47.

<sup>104</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 7–8 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 18–9).

<sup>105</sup> Compare *Acts of Mar Mari*, 27 with 10 and 14 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 21, 25, and 38–9). Also see Jullien and Jullien, *Eglise Perse*, 49.

of the Church of the East into 'Nestorianism'.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, Mari's absence from *synaxaria* outside the Church of the East might imply that he was associated with a particular Christology.<sup>107</sup>

However, the structure of the *Acts of Mar Mari* and the use of material drawn from the *Doctrina* and scenes parallel to it imply that, though Mari was a Diophysite figure, the collection grew out of claims to missionary precedence made in Edessa, and that they reflect a Diophysite version of the Abgar legend. Multiple royal conversion tales, with their origins in Manichaean stories, were Christianised in a Diophysite framework that depended on the myth of a single mission that emanated from first century Edessa, which may have been facilitated by real connections, both in the spread of Syriac language, thanks to trade links and population transfers of Roman captives within the Sasanian empire, and in shared ascetic practices, such as the *bnay qyama* of Aphrahat's church.<sup>108</sup>

Perhaps the most convincing evidence for the importance and dissemination of the Abgar legend in creating a framework for local conversion tales is the repeated attempts at subversion of Edessene prerogatives by Seleucia-Ctesiphon and the opposition to the Miaphysite ideas of the *Doctrina*. Though the text is a compilation of numerous different foundation legends, as a whole it reacts against, or usurps, the central themes of the *Doctrina*, such as the story of a miraculous image, the apostolic claims deriving from Addai and the Cyrilline Christology of the *Doctrina*. The association of a miraculous image with Edessa is attacked at the start of the narrative, by locating it at Caesarea to be venerated by pagans in an unattached story at the beginning of the *Acts* and the promises of invulnerability that Jesus bestowed on Edessa in the *Doctrina* are transferred to Seleucia in the *Acts*, because it is the burial place of Mari.<sup>109</sup> The *Acts of Mar Mari* take on an Edessene myth that had proved useful to many cities and then challenge these Edessene claims to predominance and transfer them to Seleucia.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, the entrusting of

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 56–7. Also see the bibliography on Ibas in n. 175.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>108</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2. 184–209; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 6 (tr. Valavanolickal, 123–60).

<sup>109</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 1 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 1).

<sup>110</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 32 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 44).

Addai's legacy to the *bnay hire* is replaced in Seleucia by Mari's nomination of Papa as his successor, traditionally the first *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and a champion of its prerogatives over the entire Church of the East.<sup>111</sup>

Additionally, its use of the Addai legend also involves the removal of all of the sermons of Addai, allowing the author to remove the Cyrilline focus of these sermons and replace them with a Christology more in keeping with the sixth-century church of the East. Thus a debate in the future site of Seleucia about the role of the Virgin Mary emphasises a Diophysite Christology. In it, an onlooker asks Mari whether God took a woman and had a son by her. He replies that the origin of the Son was not from a woman but from the nature of the Father, with his power and wisdom.<sup>112</sup>

The author pursues the same agenda when he names Mari as the founder of the school of Nisibis, the site of the Diophysite theological school of Edessa after its expulsion in 489.<sup>113</sup> Claims that Addai founded the Edessene School could be countered by a foundation by Mari, who had better Diophysite credentials and was connected to the claims of authority by Seleucia-Ctesiphon.<sup>114</sup>

Mesopotamia did witness indigenous parallels to the literary creation of Edessa's *Doctrina* in the fifth century. The *History of Karka de Beth Slouq* involved a similar invention or recollection of local histories and a Christianisation of the past. The history records the foundation of the city by the Assyrians, the Ninevite origins of contemporary Christian ascetic practice and martyrdoms under Shapur II in the fourth century and under Yazdegard II in the middle of the fifth century.<sup>115</sup> It is a mythic history unequalled in the brief conversions stories of the *Acts of Mar Mari*.

However, the *Acts* illustrate the potential of the connection to the Abgar legend and the personalities of Mari and Abgar to oppose such histories and claim local predominance. Fiey identifies Darabhar

<sup>111</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 33 (eds. Jullien and Jullien, 45). On Papa see Winkler and Baum, *Church of the East*, 9–10.

<sup>112</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 20 (Jullien and Jullien, 30).

<sup>113</sup> *Acts of Mar Mari*, 7 (Jullien and Jullien, 18–9).

<sup>114</sup> On Mari see Winkler and Baum, *Church of the East*, 12.

<sup>115</sup> This text is discussed in J. Fiey, 'Vers la rehabilitation de l'Histoire de Karka de Beth Slouq', *AB* 82 (1964), 189–222 and dated to the sixth century.

with Darar in Beth Garmai, a rival with Karka de Beth Slouq for the metropolitanate.<sup>116</sup> If he is right then the Abgar legend provided a model for a royal conversion story that might have allowed Darar to develop a rival myth to the *History of Karka de Beth Slouq*, through the reuse of the Abgar legend and a connection to the apostolic legend of Addai. Edessene connections and the attachment to Addai may have proved useful in a wide variety of local competitions for authority, which could embed local conversion stories into the more authoritative framework of a collection of conversion tales, which also guaranteed the prestige of the *catholicos*, allowing sees like Darar to ride on its coat-tails.

The *Acts of Mar Mari* illustrate how the local Edessene legends surrounding Abgar and Addai acquired a wider significance within Sasanian Mesopotamia in the fifth and sixth centuries. The 'Mesopotamia' that was converted from Edessa seems to have been extended from the environs of Harran and Nisibis in the *Doctrina Addai* to include the whole region from Edessa to the Persian Gulf.<sup>117</sup> The rebuttal of Edessene claims in the *Acts* shows us that the idea of missionary precedence and the Christological ideas associated with them were taken seriously in the Church of the East.<sup>118</sup> So Edessa looked east to Assyria, Beth Garmai, and Babylonia, as well as west to Antioch and Rome. Mirkovic's view of the *Doctrina* as a text integrating Edessa into the Roman empire must be qualified accordingly: the myth of the city's importance in both Sasanian and Roman worlds highlights a history independent of both.

The *Acts of Mar Mari* allow us to see three levels of the memory of missionary activity in Mesopotamia. The first was the initial memory of Manichaean missions to various pre-Sasanian kinglets. Around the time of the formation of the first written versions of the *Doctrina* in the early fifth century, these stories were then integrated into a single grand narrative, in a second stage that connected local legend

<sup>116</sup> J. Fiey, *L'Assyrie chrétienne: contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq*, 3 vols. (Beirut, 1968), 3. 76–81.

<sup>117</sup> *Doctrina Addai* (ed. Howard, 18).

<sup>118</sup> Note the Miaphysite associations of Addai himself: a possible legacy of the *Doctrina's* Christology. Thus the Miaphysite doctor and courtier Gabriel of Sinjar forced the acceptance of Addai as the first apostle of the east at the 612 synod of Seleucia. *Synodicon Orientale* (ed. Chabot, 564).

to the missions of Addai, a figure employed by both Miaphyiste and Diophysite forces in the city of Edessa. This grand narrative gave force to the different sees in Mesopotamia in their local battles for prominence, but it may also have been a persuasive legend because it explained real similarities, in ascetic behaviour and the use of Syriac, with the church in Edessa, similarities that were confirmed and appealed to during the missions of Marutha of Maypherkat. In a third stage, the see of Seluecia-Ctesiphon annexed this grand narrative, and watered down some of Edessa's distinctive claims to authority, since the latter city had, by the sixth century, become increasingly identified as a centre of Miaphysitism. Thus this Seleucian grand narrative followed the objectives of the synod of Isho'yahb I, whose credal formulae it adopts, in its opposition to the Miaphysite missions that were making inroads into Sasanian Mesopotamia in the late sixth century.<sup>119</sup>

### **The Cities of Nimrod and the 'Land of Nod' in the *Cave of Treasures***

A second text from Sasanian Mesopotamia gives us further insight into the evolution of local Christian identities under the aegis of Edessa. The *Cave of Treasures* is a re-telling of the Old Testament in a strongly Christian framework. It portrays Adam and his patriarchal successors as 'prophets, priests and kings' on the model of Christ. It situates a series of lesser previews of the events of the incarnation and crucifixion within the Old Testament and explores their significance to a small community of believers descending centred around patriarchs such as Seth, Melchizidek, and Abraham, leading up to the time of Christ. This community embalms the bodies of the patriarchs and buries them at Golgotha, to be protected by an ascetic guardian: the Cave of Treasures of the title.

The dating of the text is problematic. Its blend of Babylonian astrological ideas, Jewish apocrypha and the thoughts of Ephraem and Aphrahat led Su-Min-Ri to see it as the central repository of Mesopotamian Christian imagery which Ephraem and Aphrahat drew upon. For Su-Min-Ri, the Bardaisanite cosmological ideas in

<sup>119</sup> Jullien and Jullien, *Eglise Perse*, 108–11; Labourt, *Christianisme*, 202–3.

the text point to a third-century date.<sup>120</sup> But the Christian terms upon which the whole text is organised, suggest instead a fourth- to sixth-century composition, drawing on older material, and I propose a more precise dating, of 480–520, for the first compilation of the text as we have received it, on the basis of its use of proper names.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, the three wise men in the Christmas narrative, whom the *Cave* says came from ‘the land of Nod’, are identified as Yazdegard, Hormizd and Peroz.<sup>122</sup> These were the names of three Sasanian shahanshahs who reigned consecutively in the last half of the fifth century. This identification, first made by Bezold, makes the most sense of these proper names, in spite of the multiple variants that exist in the (probably later) Western Syriac and Arabic traditions of the text, which can all be understood as mutations of these original proper names.<sup>123</sup> Alongside the other datable reference in the text, such as invective against Cyril of Alexandria, the weight of the evidence seems to point to a later dating, to within a generation of the reign of Peroz, i.e. c.480–520, which would also fit the attack on Cyril and the text’s general vilification of the Egyptians, who, since Cyril was patriarch at Alexandria, are associated with Miaphysites.

The references to Sasanian monarchs in the text, and the description of Nod as the land of the magi are instructive for the text’s sense of territory. Su-Min-Ri situates the text in Assyria because of its repeated focus on the land of Nod. This location, which only appears once in Genesis, becomes, for the *Cave of Treasures*, the place where Cain is exiled and where he is killed by Lamech; where the magi take their incense and the location for the journeys of Nimrod, which are described in great detail.<sup>124</sup> Using epigraphic and sigillographic studies by Fiey and Gignoux, Su-Min-Ri also notes that the Arsacids had known the region of Adiabene as Nod-Shirakan and the toponym

<sup>120</sup> A. Su-Min-Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors: étude sur l’histoire de la texte et de ses sources* (Louvain, 2000), 340 and 523.

<sup>121</sup> C. Leonhard, ‘Observations on the date of the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 326 (2001), 298–310.

<sup>122</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 45. 19 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 368).

<sup>123</sup> For discussion and bibliography see Su-Min-Ri, *Commentaire*, 458. The discussion that follows concerns only the eastern traditions of the *Cave*, which seem to underlie the western versions of the text.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

'Nod' is attested in inscriptions in Karka de beth Slouq and Arbela; data that supports the internal evidence of the text.<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, this region had one of the largest concentrations of Zoroastrians and ethnic Persians within Mesopotamia at Arbela, and saw widescale church construction in the sixth century: conditions that might explain the text's unusual religious and cultural syncretism.<sup>126</sup>

The positive role the *Cave of Treasures* allocates to Nimrod is extremely unusual. He was traditionally an opponent of Abraham, but here he is the founder of a series of Mesopotamian cities from Seleucia to Edessa and the creator of the pure, original form of the Zoroastrian religion. Like the story of the foundation of Karka de Beth Slouq by Sargon, dimly remembered figures of the past were used to provide foundation myths.<sup>127</sup> And the foundation myths of this text, such as the associations given to the name Nod and the interest shown in the Zoroastrian, extra-Biblical legends that accrued around Nimrod all seem to confirm Su-Min-Ri's location of the text in 'Assyria'.

Moreover, as Fiey notes, a series of places in this area were already associated with Nimrod, such as Mosul (Nimrud-Athor) and Tell-Nimrud, the capital of Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria.<sup>128</sup> Walker has suggested a number sites, such as Ashur, Nineveh, and the shrine of Mar Qardagh at Melqi, where preservation of Assyrian toponyms, settlement patterns, and building shapes in new constructions might imply some blurred memory of an Assyrian past.<sup>129</sup> Even though there was no continuous settlement at Tell-Nimrud, the ruins of a mostly forgotten past must have demanded explanation of some

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 574–5. Also see J. Curtis (ed.), *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods: Rejection and Renewal c.238 B.C.-A.D. 642* (London, 2000), 80, fig. 30 for one of these Middle Persian seals.

<sup>126</sup> S. Simpson, 'Mesopotamia in the Sasanian period: settlement patterns, arts, crafts', in Curtis (ed.), *Mesopotamia and Iran*, 57–67.

<sup>127</sup> *History of Karka de Beth Slouq* (ed. Bedjan, 502). S. Brock, 'Christians in the Sasanian Empire: a case of divided loyalties', in id., *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), vi. xiv emphasises the text's reference to the fast of Nineveh, claiming the origins of a local custom in the proto-Christianity of the patriarch Jonah.

<sup>128</sup> Fiey, *Assyrie*, 2. 568–71.

<sup>129</sup> J. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley, 2006), ch. 5.



kind, which led the author to locate Biblical events in his own homeland.<sup>130</sup>

### Ascetic Practice in the *Cave of Treasures*

The *Cave of Treasures* as a whole is focused on the prefiguration of the life of Christ. Thus Abel's blood and Adam's body stand for the body and blood of the future Christ in Yared the Sethian's sermon to his family.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, a series of crucial events for this community of believers occur at Jerusalem: it is here that Adam is created, where the embalmed bodies of the patriarchs are deposited after the flood, and where Melchizedek is told to practise his priesthood and subsequently reigns as king.<sup>132</sup> Jerusalem and the cave of the embalmed patriarchs is made into a centre for the religion of proto-Christian true believers, whose rites go back to the Naziritic practices of Noah and to the original priesthood of Adam.<sup>133</sup>

In the *Cave*, the events of the distant past are seen to reoccur in later time. The burial of the patriarchs at Jerusalem and the ties of descent between the patriarchs and Christ bring out the longstanding Christian theme of the Old Testament prophets' prefiguration of Christ. The patriarchs also prefigure Christian action: thus Abraham receives communion from Melchizedek at Golgotha and brings him tithes, and Noah's reception of the dove on the Ark is explicitly seen as a forerunner of baptism.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the societies led by the patriarchs are seen as models for Christian living: the sexual segregation in Noah's Ark and the peace between different social orders all reflect the ideals of Christian society.<sup>135</sup>

The model of the establishment of norms of religious practice in the deep past is used to give weight to ascetic practices that courted controversy in the Roman church of the fourth century and the Sasanian church of the sixth, namely the 'Naziritic' practices such

<sup>130</sup> D. Oates, *Studies in Ancient Northern Iraq* (London, 1968), 247.

<sup>131</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 10. 8 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 76).

<sup>132</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 2. 22–3; 22. 12; 30. 3 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 18, 172, and 232).

<sup>133</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 4. 1; 16. 24–8 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 28 and 124–6).

<sup>134</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 19. 13 and 20. 1–11; 28. 11 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 150–4 and 220).

<sup>135</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 20. 10 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 154).

as wearing skins or leaving hair uncut, which are used to characterise the priesthood. After leaving the Ark, Noah consecrates Shem at Jerusalem to be 'a nazirite (נזיר) all his life. He will not have a wife or offer up the blood of wild animals or birds, but offer (בשר) (bread and wine to God . . . he shall wear the skins of animals and shall not shave his hair or cut his nails, for he is God's priest'.<sup>136</sup>

The practices described for Shem and later Melchizidek are strikingly similar to those described in Theodoret of Cyrillus' *Historia Religiosa* and to the banned practices of Rabbula's canons for the *bnay qyama*. For the author of the *Cave of Treasures*, these practices were hallowed by ancient custom and, moreover, were the defining characteristics of priesthood: all the priests in the text are also celibate Nazirites. Thus a story about the proto-Christian practice defined contemporary orthodoxy.

The freedom of the *Cave's* rewriting of Christian history suggests that the limits of Christian canonical texts were not clearly defined and the church had little power to enforce doctrinal decisions. This was a milieu where assertions of the antiquity of ascetic practice and priestly behaviour must have been especially important in demarcating the church. The greater freedom of the *Cave's* author would have been matched by a difficulty in enforcing proper behaviour and belief. For instance, the permeable thought-world in which the author lived forced him to engage at length with Jewish criticisms of the genealogy of Christ, a task that no one had to address in the better-policed church of Justinian's empire.<sup>137</sup> By appealing to ancient precedent, he aimed to keep Christian practice distinct from that of surrounding cultures, irrespective of whether the threat of change came from Zoroastrian influence or the mores of new converts to Christianity or the arguments of Mesopotamian Jews.

### Language and Race in the *Cave of Treasures*

One aspect of the text's retelling of the Old Testament is the existence of multiple falls after Eden. Only after expulsion from Eden can there

<sup>136</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 16. 24–8 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 124–6).

<sup>137</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 52 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 318–26).

be a loss of virginity, but even then, it is possible for the children of Seth to separate themselves from the continued fornication of the Cainites: it is still possible to avoid the fallen state of man and to live on a mountain away from the Cainites.<sup>138</sup> Here Seth rules on account of his purity and maintains 'the purity of his sons and daughters': the eventual fall of the Sethians only occurs after being lured down from the mountains by the flute-music of the Cainites.<sup>139</sup>

Just as there is a recurrent theme in which individuals are made priests by Naziritic rite in various generations, the evolution of a corrupting people, such as the Cainites, reoccurs in the story with the fall of the Canaanites, who renew Cainite practices and are cursed by Noah to be 'the servants of servants, even to Egyptians, Cushites and black-skinned Ethiopians'.<sup>140</sup> Thus Old Testament history affirms a racial hierarchy and an inferiority transmitted to the descendants of Canaan.

The fall of the Cainites and the fall of the Canaanites both involve a sundering of the human race after some sinful event, in which a sinful part of the human race is removed from those who maintain pure religion. Importantly, the *Cave* imagines a fourth fall at the tower of Babel, with the difference that, in this event, language is connected with race: many peoples, each speaking their own language, are sundered from the original people, who continue to speak the original language. And, critically, the *Cave* imagines this Ur-language to have been Syriac:

Since the time of Adam there was a single language, Syriac, which is Aramaic, the king of all languages. Ancient writers were wrong to say that Hebrew is the oldest language—all languages are derived from Syriac . . . in Syriac writing the left hand stretches to the right hand . . . while Greeks, Jews and Romans draw themselves to God's right hand.<sup>141</sup>

Thus Babel is a final fall, the moment when the many peoples are sundered from the original group who remain unchanged and speak Syriac. The connection between language and race allows all other

<sup>138</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 5. 17–8 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 42).

<sup>139</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 7. 1–2 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 56).

<sup>140</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 21. 10–16. See also 21. 23–8 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 160 and 164).

<sup>141</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 24. 9–11 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 186).

people to be classed as false innovators, a classification that is given contemporary relevance by the difference between their scripts. Indeed, in the oriental manuscript, the latter are explicitly defined as Greeks, Romans and Hebrews. In a schema where the hierarchy of the races of the world is determined by a series of 'Falls', differences in language and script, because of their connection to Babel, are seen both as an indicator of race and of Syrian precedence at the top of the racial hierarchy.

Finally, this equation of race and language and the hierarchy employed by the author is confirmed at the end of the narrative in the Passion:

Pilate did not write above the Cross in Syriac because the Suryaye did not participate in shedding the blood of truth. For Herod was a Greek, Caiaphas a Jew and Pilate a Roman. The Suryaye had not part in this, as is testified by Abgar, king of Edessa, who wished to destroy Jerusalem because the Jews crucified Christ.<sup>142</sup>

So, for the author of *Cave*, the Suryaye were marked out as superior to other peoples. Ascetic customs that were practiced in Roman and Sasanian Mesopotamia were identified as the practices of the patriarchs, the Ur-Christians. But, more significantly, their language, which the *Cave* identifies as the determinant of race, is the language of the patriarchs. In some sense, the author seems to claim the Syrian inheritance of a purity from before Babel, since the description of Babel equates linguistic transmission with genealogical descent, an impression that is confirmed by the importance of the Suryaye at the Passion, where they are the only sinless people. The Pentecost remains a call to universal conversion: the apostles are given all languages 'so that they might teach in the tongues that they had received so that strife might cease'.<sup>143</sup> But even this recalls the fact that the Pentecost is an inversion of Babel, a temporary return to a time when all spoke Syriac, just as the mission to which the apostles were called was a speciality both for Edessa and for the church of the East.

Critically, Abgar plays an important part in the claims of the Suryaye to be superior, blameless people. His letter to Christ

<sup>142</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 53. 25–7 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 452).

<sup>143</sup> *Cave of Treasures*, 54. 14–15 (ed. Su-Min-Ri, 458–60).

provides the proof of the special position of the Suryaye. If the text was written in 'Nod', the region of Adiabene and Nineveh, then we have an indication that the Abgar legend provided a framework for the evolution of local identities. The *Cave* shows us how civic foundation myths, which had evolved in a permeable cultural world of Zoroastrian stories and Targumic interpretations, could be included as part of a wider story promoting a shared 'Syrian' identity.<sup>144</sup>

Moreover; this identity was given form by a shared language that had probably been spread from Edessa onto more localised Aramaic dialects. Syriac, Edessene Aramaic, became, in a zone stretching from Emesa to Iran, the only dialect of Aramaic suitable for writing; an annexation of other Aramaic dialects that is recognised in the *Cave's* phrase 'Suryaya which is Aramaya, the king of all languages'. Syriac, once it had spread, retained its position as a liturgical language and provided the core for claims that Suryaye constituted not only a race but a specially chosen race. Similarly, the writer of the *Cave*, like the invisible composers of earlier versions of the *Acts of Mar Mari*, used Edessa's claims to special prestige as a Christian centre as an aegis for the development of other forms of identity, that Christianised the foundation histories of cities or proclaimed a single Syrian race, using the Edessene letter of Abgar to buttress that claim. Thus, while Brock has denied that Christians in the Sasanian empire thought of themselves in ethnic terms, emphasising the many languages used by the church and their internal divisions, the evidence of the *Cave of Treasures* suggests that, in one area at least, a religious community claimed an ethnic identity for itself, and connected this to the broader history of all Syriac-speakers.<sup>145</sup>

### Conclusions: Edessene History after the Arab Conquest

The sheer diversity of ideas about being Edessene or Suryaya, especially within the Sasanian empire, illustrates the evolution of these

<sup>144</sup> On the permeability of oral culture in Sasanian Mesopotamia, see Walker, *Mar Qardagh*, 191–3.

<sup>145</sup> Brock, 'Divided loyalties', 16–18 (though he does acknowledge that the *athor-aye* or Assyrians may represent a specific Christian ethnic community, this is not the same as the wider sense of Suryaya identity seen here).

ideas in an acephalous environment, a world with fewer 'academic' rules, without the sense of the orthodoxy proclaimed by the Roman state. The 'centrifugal' texts that we have examined in this chapter do emphasise religious orthodoxy, but they have fewer tools with which to do this, the principal one being attachment to the tradition of apostolic figures in the past. These figures, such as Abgar, Addai, Mari, Nimrod, or the patriarchs of the *Cave of Treasures* were frequently associated with specific sites, which used them to bolster their own religious prestige. The use of Syriac, which had probably been spread from Edessa, allowed the wide dissemination of these legends surrounding Abgar and Addai within this Syriac-speaking zone.

The *Doctrina* is a text with very localised concerns, and its development, with the inclusion of the *Protonike Legend*, shows the centripetal lure of Constantinople and the growing awareness of wider debates in the text, seen especially in its anti-Jewish stance. But the text is also remarkable for its sense of cultural independence. A Christian missionary tale allowed the city's elites to tell stories about their own past within an independent kingdom and their role in guarding orthodox, apostolic practice. These tales were constructed over a pre-existing sense of ethnic and linguistic difference revealed in the *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*.

The existence of a distinctive foundation myth, not only for the city of Edessa but also for ascetic practices, such as the *bnay qyama*, that were of wider Syro-Mesopotamian provenance, and the references to oriental missions in the text allowed it to develop into an umbrella for the foundation myths of the cities of Sasanian Mesopotamia. In the *Cave of Treasures* especially, these myths may reflect earlier resentment at Sasanian religious interference and provide Christian explanations for the ruins of past civilisations, such as the buildings of Nimrod. In Edessa and in Sasanian 'north Iraq', Christian missionary stories and foundation legends allowed some claim to cultural independence from the empires of Rome and Persia, an independence supported by a language and religious culture that, by the fifth century, spread across the borderlands of these empires. The Abgar legends provided a core around which the stories of different Christian communities could coalesce, in the case of the author of the *Cave of Treasures* at least, into a sense of a 'Suryaya' ethnè built around language, script, religious practice, a homeland

in the land of the Old Testament patriarchs and the cities built by Nimrod, and the significance of all of the former as indicators of supposed descent.

The significance of this protean cluster of legends would continue beyond the Arab conquest and give the city of Edessa a particular prominence within the Syriac historical tradition. The continued existence of an Edessene scribal tradition and its archives meant that later chronicles saw an Edessene history that stretched back into the third century and before: witness the prominence of the Abgarids and the bishops of Edessa in the *Chronicle of 819*. This text focuses upon the whole of Roman Mesopotamia and is concerned with monastic foundations, Persian martyria and with ecclesiastical controversy. Yet despite this breadth, it is slanted towards Edessa, and its bishops, kings and churchmen, through its reliance on earlier Edessene chronicles for all material before the fifth century.<sup>146</sup>

Even when the Syriac historical tradition drew on classical history, the history of Edessa was frequently the only alternative way of remembering the Mesopotamian past. In the pre-Constantian period, otherwise only known through king-lists, the Bible and Eusebius' *Chronicle*, Edessa's kings were recorded alongside those of Rome and the eastern empires. For the West Syrian Jacob of Edessa and the later East Syrian Elias of Nisibis, the kings of Edessa and its Macedonian refoundation are woven into their derivative knowledge of the classical past.<sup>147</sup>

The memory of Edessa and the Abgarid kings in the chronicle tradition is also related to the Abgar legend and to the mission of Addai: thus, even though he makes no mention of the Abgar legend, it is significant that Elias begins his Abgarid king-list with Abgar V, the supposed correspondent of Christ. In some chronicles, this tradition surrounding the *Doctrina Addai* is more fully developed. The *Chronicle of 846*, possibly written by a historian from Harran with connections to Qartmin, is a case in point.<sup>148</sup> Like Jacob of

<sup>146</sup> *Chronicle of 819* (ed. Chabot).

<sup>147</sup> *Chronicle of Jacob of Edessa* (ed. Brooks, 281–2); *Chronicle of Elias of Nisibis* (ed. Chabot, 73).

<sup>148</sup> A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), 83. On the sources of this chronicle, and the other minor chronicles, see W. Witakowski,

Edessa, this chronicler inserts a note on the Hellenistic foundation of Edessa into a section on the Seleucid kings and the Maccabees, but he goes further by adding a passage on Addai's mission into a later section based on the New Testament. He records the mission to Abgar, Abgar's letter to Tiberius and the emperor's persecution of the Jews and the later missions, first into Mesopotamia and then 'Persia, Media, Armenia and Assyria, to Khuzistan and the lands of Gog and Magog, right up to India and the borders of the land of Babylonia'.<sup>149</sup> The chronicler has taken the *Doctrina Addai*, and its claims for Edessene missionary pre-eminence, apostolic antiquity and opposition to the Jews, and set it at the root of Christian history that follows, with its lives of patriarchs, martyrs, heretics, and Christian emperors.<sup>150</sup>

This vision of Edessa at the starting point of the Christian history of Mesopotamia is preserved in the Syriac historical tradition until the generations after the Crusades. Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) places 'Addai who baptised Abgar and preached at Edessa' at the head of a long list of missionaries to the East, including Aggai, who appears here as the apostle of Armenia. Furthermore, like the Harranite chronicler, he remembers Abgar's role in avenging the crucifixion by asking Tiberius to persecute the Jews.<sup>151</sup> Finally, this focus on Abgar is supplemented in the *Chronicle of 1234*, where stories of the foundation of the city by Nimrod and Seleucos coexist in a blend of several of the pre-existing foundation accounts of the past millenium, from both sides of the Tigris, to account for the thirteenth century rivalry between Edessa and Mosul.<sup>152</sup> It is, perhaps, in this long afterlife of the *Doctrina Addai* tradition that we see most fully its success in asserting Suryaya distinctiveness and its contribution to Edessa's continuing prestige within Syriac historical thought.

*The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre: A Study in the History of Historiography* (Uppsala, 1997), 76–82.

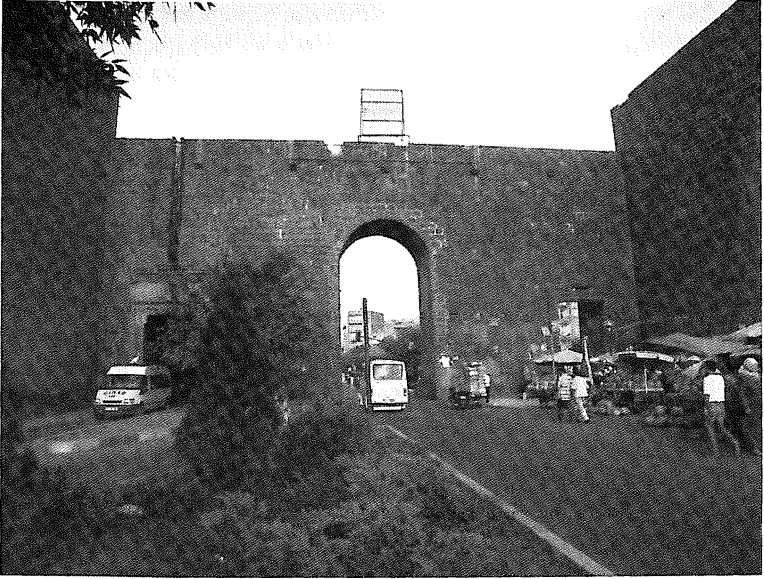
<sup>149</sup> *Chronicle to 846* (ed. Brooks, 167 and 175).

<sup>150</sup> The lost seventh century history of the East Syrian Daniel bar Maryam may have shared this chronicle's focus on Abgar and Addai. See the reconstruction of E. Degen, 'Daniel bar Maryam, Ein nestorianischer Kirchenhistoriker', *Oriens Christianus* 52 (1968), 45–80.

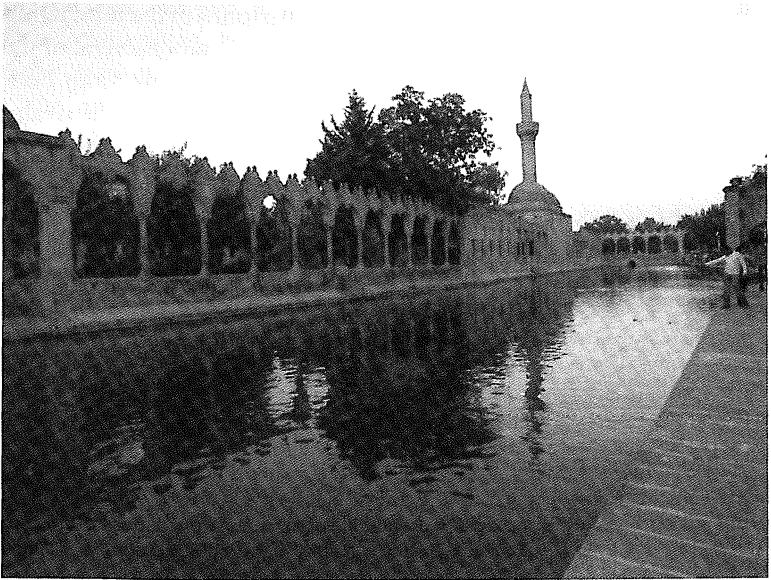
<sup>151</sup> Michael the Syrian, 5. 1–2 and 6. 1 (ed. Chabot 93–4).

<sup>152</sup> *Chronicle of 1234* (ed. Chabot, 105–6; 120–4).





**Figure 1** Amida. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.



**Figure 2** Edessa. Sacred carp pool. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.



**Figure 3** Edessa. The citadel. Photograph: Elif Keser-Kayaalp.



1980.46b

**Figure 4** Hnana. The blessed earth of the saints, with a depiction of Symeon the stylite. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango.



**Figure 5** Telanissos. The monastery of Symeon the stylite. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango.



**Figure 6** Cyrrhus. Photograph: C. Mango and M. Mango.

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## The *Julian Romance*

The last chapter emphasised the importance of the *Doctrina Addai* as a framework for the evolution of different ideas of a Suryaya ethnîe, especially within the Sasanian Mesopotamia, where Christian communities, speaking various dialects of Aramaic, were autonomous and self-governing entities within the empire. But within the Roman world, the *Doctrina* was received as one claim to Christian prestige amongst many. For instance, sites in Anatolia and Macedonia could repeat Christ's promise of invulnerability for Edessa without any reference to the rest of the legend: the apotropaic powers of Edessa could be freely appropriated within the Roman empire.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Armenian versions of the *Doctrina Addai* could replace Edessa with Armenia as Addai's final destination, make Abgar an Armenian, and merge this foundation account with indigenous legends of conversion by Gregory the Illuminator, founder of the first patriarchal house.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of the legends surrounding Abgar and Addai for assertions of a Suryaya ethnîe seems peculiar to areas where Syriac-speaking missions had been working without outside competition, where Syriac language and ascetic practices produced fertile ground for legends connecting the churches of Mesopotamia to Edessa and for the propagation of a shared body of invented histories. Within the Roman world, Edessa's invented histories were one of a number of claims to religious prestige.

However, if Edessa's position within the Roman world limited the possibilities for the western and southern expansion of a sense of being

<sup>1</sup> F. Trombley and J. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Liverpool, 2000), 6 n. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Tixeront, *Origines*, 66–73; V. Calzolari, 'Réécriture des textes apocryphes en Arménien', *Apocrypha* 8 (1997), 97–110, at 102–9.

'Suryaya', as had occurred in Sasanian Mesopotamia, then it did mould the development of that identity within the city of Edessa itself. It will be argued here that Edessa's distinctive position within the christological debates of the sixth century and widespread (though far from total) opposition to what developed into a Chalcedonian orthodoxy led to the maturity of earlier assertions of an Edessene ethnîe. Where pseudo-Labubna and his contemporaries had focused upon the shared religious practice and history of the city of Edessa, or upon its language, the author of the *Julian Romance*, a collection of hagiographies, composed in Syriac in the sixth century<sup>3</sup> and set in the fourth century,<sup>4</sup> centring on the emperors Julian and Jovian, could assert a more complex imagined community in Edessa. This more mature identity employed the language of self-control, which had been employed in the ecclesiastical historians to exclude barbarians and heretics, to condemn the pagan emperor Julian and produced a new model for Roman history. This history, while it stressed the providential prosperity of the Romans under Christian emperors such as Constantine, denied the authority of Constantinople as 'new Rome' to provide the emperor with authority. And, though this criticism is ostensibly directed at Julian, the reader may be intended to see it apply equally to the Roman empire of the early sixth century.

## PART I

### Summary

The *Julian Romance* is dominated by an arch-narrative, describing Julian's persecutions within the empire and his invasion of Persia,

<sup>3</sup> For the only Syriac manuscript, written in a sixth-century estrangelo hand, see W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac MSS in the British Museum* (London, 1872), 1042, No. 918.

<sup>4</sup> Greek proper names may suggest that fourth-century Greek hagiography provided some raw material for the *Romance*. See M. Van Esbroek, 'Le soi-distant roman de Julien l'Apostat' in H. J.-W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, and G. Reinink (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum* (Rome, 1987), 191–202. However, the presence of these Greek names does not provide evidence for the date or language of the text's compilation. A. Muraviev, 'The Syriac Julian Romance and its place in the literary history', *Khristianskji Vostock* 7 (1999), 194–206, at 203, emphasises that the text is a synthesis of at least three earlier texts.

that is interspersed with the interventions of his lieutenant Jovian, who later succeeds him as emperor. This narrative proceeds from the death of Constantine to the accession of Jovian, and the latter represents a return to good Christian rule, illustrating the author's hopes for pious rule to compliment the examples of tyranny displayed by Julian.

This narrative is interspersed with a series of shorter excursions, each based around a particular individual who stood up to Julian and was threatened with or received martyrdom. Some of these stories may have been received from other traditions, rather than being compositions of the author, since their sentiments occasionally differ from that of the main narrative (thus the cities of Antioch and Constantinople produce local martyrs but are condemned in other sections of the narrative). Of these hagiographic subplots, the first, set around Eusebius of Rome, is the most important, since it establishes the criteria for the just rule of emperors and sets up a parallel between the stance made by Julian's opponents at Rome and those at Edessa, a juxtaposition that implies that Rome and Edessa are the two chosen cities of the empire.

The *Romance* begins with the death of Constantine, the succession of Julian and his conflict with Eusebius of Rome. Here the madness of the pagan tyrant Julian is contrasted with the eloquence and patience of Eusebius in an introductory passage that establishes this conflict in Rome as an example for other Christians and a prototype for others to oppose Julian.<sup>5</sup> Eusebius is then visited by Julian's emissary Adoctus who asks him to become a pagan priest as part of Julian's project to reverse the achievements of the house of Constantine.<sup>6</sup> Eusebius refuses, chastising Adoctus for 'calling a madman king, when he is a tyrant who has left his creator, God, and worshipped (عبد) his creatures' and prepares himself for martyrdom.<sup>7</sup> In his response, Adoctus emphasises that Rome's prosperity has been due to its piety, and its willingness to worship the gods.<sup>8</sup> This prompts Volusianus, chief of Rome's elites, to support

<sup>5</sup> *Julian Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 5–8).

<sup>6</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 13–6).

<sup>7</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 18).

<sup>8</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 21).

Eusebius and proclaim his own Christianity. He reminds Adoctus that Julian must be acclaimed at Rome in order to be emperor and he decides to become 'a stranger (زاجر) to the power (سلطان) of the Romans rather than be a stranger to the faith of our fathers'.<sup>9</sup>

However, the Jews and pagans of Rome promise to aid Julian in repeating the persecutions of Diocletian, in revenge for the Christian destruction of synagogues, and to build altars for sacrifice. Julian's allies are then attacked by Roman monks, who are helped by monks from Mesopotamia, who kill all the Jews and pagans 'falling upon them with staffs in the streets and beating them like dogs'.<sup>10</sup> In the aftermath of this Eusebius and the elites of Rome debate what to do with a group of captured pagans, which culminates in their execution by the elites of Rome, who burn them on their altars on the grounds that any supposed conversion by the pagans would just be a ruse.<sup>11</sup> After this Rome's elites decide to abdicate government, both to avoid any blame if they do not remain steadfast Christians and to fulfil the ascetic demands of their religion and cast aside their possessions.<sup>12</sup> The scene then shifts to Julian's camp, where the philosopher Aplatous advises the emperor on the difference between monarchy and tyranny: 'if a man wishes to overturn what is correct, one overturns the royalty which he should glorify and is a tyrant instead of a king'. This philosopher goes on to emphasise that the title of king of the Romans can only be taken by one who has been acclaimed in Rome. Julian then proceeds to Rome to receive his acclamation, but is refused by the citizens when he denies the religious toleration they request and imprisons the elites of the city, dressing them in 'the soiled clothes of women'.<sup>13</sup> Next he prepares to execute these elites, ordering the citizens to appear in white robes, but instead the citizens defy him and wear garments of mourning.<sup>14</sup> When he brings out Eusebius for execution the citizens attempt to stop him, crying 'Let our city be ruined and our goods pillaged, but do not hurt this pious man'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 23).

<sup>10</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 24–6).

<sup>11</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 26–31).

<sup>12</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 31–3).

<sup>13</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 33–9).

<sup>14</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 42–3).

<sup>15</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 45).



Julian then prepares to hurl Eusebius into a fire, mocking him and reminding him that even Socrates could not save himself from the fire of the Athenians, but Eusebius is untouched by the flames and the pagan priests who surround him are consumed by flames instead.<sup>16</sup> Next Eusebius is sent to be killed with an axe, but the executioner is killed at the last moment by an angel. At this the people rise up against Julian and refuse to acclaim him:

Rather see our blood and that of our children shed than see them bow to idols, let our goods be plundered than our churches be destroyed . . . If you will not worship Christ, who the Christian kings before you worshipped, you will not be a king over us, for our city does not need a stranger to king over it, for its king is alive and has risen and will never be destroyed.<sup>17</sup>

The final, much longer, section of the *Romance* masquerades as a letter from Jovian's chamberlain to the head of a monastery. It is dominated by the relationship between Jovian and Julian, their government within the empire and their invasion of Persia, in which Jovian pretends to be a servant of Julian. It begins by decrying Julian's madness and his undoing of the work of Constantine and Jovian's attempts to prevent Julian's destruction of Christian churches.<sup>18</sup> Here the author notes the many martyrs who were created under Julian, before concentrating on Julian's plans for the conquest of Persia.<sup>19</sup> Julian commences his promulgation of paganism by promising great wealth to Constantinople in exchange for their persecution of Christians, after the refusal of Volusianus and the elites of Rome to do his bidding.<sup>20</sup> Here Julian is opposed by one Maximus who tells his fellow-citizens that 'Madness rules this tyrant-king. Woe to the kingdom of the Romans that has lost its kings and found one like this in their place' and condemns Julian's paganism for its reliance on the ignorant Homer, who did not know the true God and spread immorality with his myths.<sup>21</sup> This Maximus then makes an assassination attempt upon Julian while he is distracted by

<sup>16</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 48–51).

<sup>17</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 54).

<sup>18</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 61–2).

<sup>19</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 70–2).

<sup>20</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 76–8).

<sup>21</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 79–81).

watching female dancers at a pagan feast, failing to kill him but knocking the crown from Julian's head.<sup>22</sup> However, Maximus' example does not convince the inhabitants of Constantinople, since he is acclaimed there and 'called the king of the Romans'.<sup>23</sup>

The focus of the *Romance* then shifts to the east of the Mediterranean, to Antioch, Edessa, Nisibis, and Samaria, where the author notes that Christians 'dressed according to their religion were attacked by the country people in the land of the Samaritans'.<sup>24</sup> This last observation of the author is not connected to the rest of this part of the narrative. Instead it should be read as a comment on the state of the empire under Julian, where rule by a pagan meant that monks could not be protected in their fragile communities in Samaria. Here Julian declares war on Shapur [II], citing his failure to persecute Christians as a *casus belli*.<sup>25</sup> This is essentially an inversion of Constantine's letter to Shapur, preserved in the ecclesiastical histories, which demanded the protection of Christian communities in Persia.<sup>26</sup> For the author, it seems that the protection of Christians in Persia, like the maintenance of peace in Samaria, were the duties of a good emperor, which were opposed by Julian. Shapur responds by sending his lieutenant Arimhar to investigate the situation in Syria. This Arimhar meets Jovian and the two lieutenants conspire to commence the war quickly after the former had provided intelligence of the Persian lines.<sup>27</sup>

Next Julian returns to his religious policy in the east, sending out letters to Antioch. His first success is among the Jews of Tiberias, who make him a crown and adopt paganism, on the grounds that Solomon had set an example for Jewish paganism in the past and in the hope that Julian would restore the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> Then Julian arrives in Antioch and is greeted by the inhabitants with white cloths and rejoicing since 'they had been afraid to reveal themselves under

<sup>22</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 95–6).

<sup>23</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 99–100).

<sup>24</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 100–1).

<sup>25</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 102).

<sup>26</sup> Sozomen, *HE* 2. 15 (ed. Bidez and Hanson, 70).

<sup>27</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 104–7).

<sup>28</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 108–10).

Christian kings'. Julian praises the Antiochenes and Jews and pagans pillage the city's churches, despite the warnings of a local holy man.<sup>29</sup>

A Jew, Humnas of Edessa, then denounces the citizens of Edessa to Julian for their Christianity. The Edessenes, to a man, refuse to allow Julian to enter their city, recognising the pagan dress of his emissaries and clothing the city walls in black cloth for mourning 'for Julian the wicked sat on Constantine's throne'. They tell Julian's ambassadors to go to the pagan city of Harran. They go on to add that all the citizens, except for the Jews, agree with this and that the city was confided to Christ by Constantine on his deathbed, who foresaw the reign of Julian and sent a letter to that effect to the treasury of Edessa. This letter promised the protection of the city by Christ until, the author notes, its theft by heretics.<sup>30</sup> The Edessenes go on to express their shock at Julian's message, since they are ruled by Christ, 'king of all kings', which is then occasion for an extended metaphor that makes Edessa both the bride of Christ and a widow, in mourning for Julian's paganism.<sup>31</sup>

However, the Jews of Edessa take this opportunity to greet Julian as he crosses the Euphrates to complain at the seizure of their homes and synagogues and to implore him to return Jerusalem to them.<sup>32</sup> At the same time a group of Christian soldiers, whom the text just calls Romans, desert from Julian's army and flock to Edessa 'since, of all the cities of the east, she had continued in her faith'. These Romans then apprehend and exterminate the Jews on their return to Edessa 'cleansing the city of Judaism and paganism, so that there was not a single person in the city who did not worship the Cross'. At the end of this scene the Edessenes send another message to Julian, reminding him that they all 'belong to Christ' and that he will fight on their behalf against 'all the kings of the world'.<sup>33</sup>

After this, Julian declares that he will raze Edessa, prompting the prayer of the Christians of Nisibis, led by Jovian and their bishop Valgash, but the emperor changes his mind and decides to spare

<sup>29</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 116–22).

<sup>30</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 121–5).

<sup>31</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 128).

<sup>32</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 132–6).

<sup>33</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 137–9).

Edessa until after his war.<sup>34</sup> Then Julian visits Harran, where he destroys all the churches and participates in rituals for the moon-god Sin. This is the occasion for a prodigy concerning his Persian war: 'in going out of the city-gate he lowered his head on horseback to bow to Sin and the crown fell from his head'. After this the priests try to comfort Julian, but the fate of his mission is shown by the behaviour of his horse: 'in anger he mounted his horse, but it stopped and would not go on . . . it started to chew on Julian's purple robe before it trembled and fell dead'. Where a characteristic of sanctity in the hagiographies had been the saint's ability to command animals, Julian's steed displays the inversion of the hagiographic *topos*. Its rejection of Julian and the symbols of his kingship shows a wider rejection by the created universe and by God.<sup>35</sup>

After the events in Harran and Edessa, the scene shifts again to follow Julian's Persian war. Here the *Romance* is mostly concerned with the military narrative, but the author is careful to reduce the agency of the apparent combatants, Julian and Shapur, both of whom are eager for war, and ascribe all the positive events within the war to Jovian and Arimhar, Shapur's adviser who becomes a Christian convert. Julian is killed on the battlefield by an arrow sent by God and Jovian is acclaimed as emperor, after revealing himself as a Christian. The peace agreements centre on the issue of the devastation of both empires, by Shapur in the time of Constantine and by Julian, and the city of Nisibis, to which the Persians claim a right as part of 'the land of the Aramoye'.<sup>36</sup> This results in Nisibis being voluntarily given to the Persians 'for a hundred years together with its eastern provinces [the Jebel Sinjar]'. After this Shapur guarantees the safety of Christian worship and permits commerce between Rome and Persia.<sup>37</sup>

The final sections of the *Romance* include a series of scenes in which the actions of Julian are inverted. Thus, at his coronation, Jovian orders that the crown be placed on the Cross—'since Christ was made king over you on the Cross and the crown of our kingdom

<sup>34</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 139–44).

<sup>35</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 146–7).

<sup>36</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 191–2).

<sup>37</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 220–2).

was blessed by him'. His actual coronation is performed by the Cross itself: 'he bowed before the Cross and the crown descended'.<sup>38</sup> Where Julian had proclaimed himself king and had gone on to lose his crown in the pagan city of Harran, Jovian received his crown after admitting the true source of his rule in Christ. Jovian also inverts Julian's attitude to Edessa: he is received there by the Christian Roman deserters clothed in white (matching Julian's reception at Harran) and is greeted by a golden cross 'made with care in the days of king Abgar', whereupon Jovian promises 'to make it more powerful than all the cities of my realm' and prays that 'its defences be blessed and its inhabitants multiplied'.<sup>39</sup> The *Romance* then finishes abruptly with a story in which Jovian heals a sick woman in Edessa before returning to reign in Constantinople.<sup>40</sup>

### Dating and Context

As we have seen, the narrative of the *Romance* is a convoluted composite work, which weaves a series of embedded hagiographies and incidental stories into a broader story about Julian and Jovian. Here I intend to examine the text's significance for the development of Edessene identity in the sixth century and the alteration and escalation of some of the definitions of the Edessene community seen in the *Doctrina Addai*. But this examination will not include the full textual analysis that the *Romance* requires: my arguments for dating the text appeal solely to its cultural and political references, rather than to linguistic arguments.

Nöldeke dated the *Romance* to the beginning of the sixth century, to 504–32, on the basis of a prophecy proclaimed by Jovian at the conclusion of the Persian war. This prophecy is worth quoting in full:

For fourteen weeks of years, the kingdom of Persia will be powerful over your kingdom [Rome] and you will pay tribute. After this time, the yoke of Persian tribute will be removed and both powers will dwell in peace for seven weeks of years. Following this, the tumult of revolution will be roused, it will

<sup>38</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 200).

<sup>39</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 225–9 and 233).

<sup>40</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 234–6).

loosen the peace of the empires and they will fight for two weeks of years, when the hand of your kingdom will be strengthened and be powerful over Persia and Persia will be subject to Roman tribute for ten years . . . after the war of today, the citadel (حصن) of Nisibis will be given for twenty-one years.<sup>41</sup>

Nöldeke suggested that the gift of Nisibis for twenty-one years referred to the *casus belli* surrounding the Anastasian war of 504–6, in which the Persians seized Amida and unsuccessfully besieged Edessa.<sup>42</sup> Joshua the Stylite reports the refusal of Zeno and Anastasius to pay tribute in the run up to this conflict, in which Roman military objectives centred on the conquest of Nisibis.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Kavad's attempts to extort money from the Romans were based on an alleged earlier treaty to pay for the garrison in the Caspian gates: an accusation which Jovian's prophecy seems to engage with, when he stipulates that Roman tribute will not last as long as the loan of Nisibis.<sup>44</sup> Thus the *Romance* denies the legitimacy of Kavad's claims against Anastasius and emphasises that this war is the result of a 'revolution' in Persia, a description that fits the growing importance of the Mazdakite sect within Persia and of Kavad's Hephthalite allies.<sup>45</sup> The final phase of the prophecy, in which the Persians are subject to tribute, seems to reflect the author's own hopes for the outcome of Roman–Persian warfare.

H. J.-W. Drijvers has suggested that Nöldeke's dating proceeds from the wrong starting point. He emphasises the use of Ephraemic language in the text, especially its modelling of Julian after Nebuchadnezzar. Julian's failed attempt to burn Eusebius of Rome, his defeat by the Persians, and his description as a lustful tyrant all follow the Ephraemic use of the Book of Daniel in his *Hymns against Julian*. Additionally, the *Romance* shares Ephraem's bias against the Jews, possibly building on third- or fourth-century material from an early version of the Abgar legend. Together, Drijvers suggests, this allows

<sup>41</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 179–80).

<sup>42</sup> T. Nöldeke, 'Ueber den syrischen Roman von Kaiser Julian', *ZDMG* 28 (1874), 271–92, at 281–2.

<sup>43</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 7 and 20).

<sup>44</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 18).

<sup>45</sup> A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (2nd edn, Copenhagen, 1944), 316–53, esp. 350–1.

us to date the text to the middle fourth century, immediately after the Persian war of 363 that the *Romance* describes.<sup>46</sup>

However, Drijvers' suggestion that the prophecies of the return of Nisibis are part of the apocalypse, rather than a real expectation in historical time does not fit the cultural and political environment of the text. The Samaritan revolt that breaks out during Julian's reign also fit the late fifth and sixth centuries: there were no Samaritan revolts between the first century and the reign of Marcian in 453, with the largest occurring under Justinian in 527 and 555. Moreover, the text's description of Jovian's peace can be seen as a general desideratum for Roman–Persian relations: the return of Nisibis, free commerce and the toleration of Persian Christians and the emphasis on Edessa's invulnerability all suit an era of Roman–Persian warfare more than the long peace of 363–504. Thus I follow Nöldeke's later dating: the Ephraemic representation of Julian is one of the influences upon the text, but is not itself a reason to date the text to the fourth century. The use of the text as a vehicle for legends of special protection by Constantine fits the early sixth century much better than the middle fourth, when the text's claims to the unique status of Edessa could have been much more easily contested and when its lack of obvious details (such as the name of the bishop of Edessa in 363) would have seemed odd.<sup>47</sup>

### Themes of the *Doctrina Addai*: The Pagans and the Jews

If Nöldeke's dating is accurate, then we can see the representation of Edessa in the text as a development of that employed in the *Doctrina Addai*. The author of the *Romance* refers to the personae and symbols of the *Doctrina* within his story: Jovian is celebrated in procession with the cross of Abgar and Constantine's letter promising the city to Christ is modelled on that in *Doctrina*. This last theme, of the ownership of Edessa by Christ, was clearly present in local imagination in the early and mid-sixth century: Joshua the stylite reports that the

<sup>46</sup> H. J.-W. Drijvers, 'The Syriac Romance of Julian, its function, place and original language' in Lavanant (ed.) *VI Symposium Syriacum* (Rome, 1994), 201–14, esp. 207.

<sup>47</sup> The unnamed bishop of Edessa appears in *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 229). M. Papoutsakis, 'The Making of a Syriac fable : From Ephrem to Romanos', *LM* 120 (2007), 29–74 at 38 also emphasises the author's debt to Jacob of Serug, which further confirms a sixth century date.

Edessenes told their Persian attackers that their city belonged ‘Not to Anastasius or to Kavad, but to Christ’ and Procopius records the public display of the letter of Christ to Abgar during Khusrau I’s siege of 544.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the author of the *Romance* is also aware of the *Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya*, composed in the same era and circle in which pseudo-Labubna worked, since the example of the pagan Sharbil’s conversion is used by Eusebius of Rome when trying to persuade the Roman elites not to kill the pagans of Rome.<sup>49</sup>

Thus certain ideas within the *Doctrina Addai*, especially the connection of Abgar to Edessa and Christ’s special relationship with the city, had proved popular and remained important features of local identity. But the ideas of the *Doctrina* were not received unchanged: we can gain an insight into the changing thought-world of Edessa between the fifth and sixth centuries in how the *Doctrina*’s themes were reworked or jettisoned to fit the concerns of the *Romance*’s author and his audience.

The *Doctrina* had been concerned with church administration; the leadership of the church and city of Edessa by the *bnay hire* and with the definition of true Christians against Marcionites and Manichees. The absence of these themes in the *Romance* reflects a changed social environment, where Marcionites and Manichees posed less of a threat and where more consistent ideas of church administration had been elaborated throughout the empire. And the absence of the *bnay hire* from the *Romance* may reflect the disappearance of that group of elites, even as the histories they invented for their city acquired a changed significance in the hands of others.

However, the *Julian Romance* enlarges upon the earlier text’s opposition to Jews and pagans, especially those in the city of Harran. The rest of this section will examine how Jews and pagans are treated in the *Romance* and the development of this representation from those of the fifth century.

Julian himself functions as an archetype of the evils of paganism for the author of the *Romance*. The arsenal of the ecclesiastical historians and hagiographers, the inversion of the self-control of

<sup>48</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 61); Procopius, *Wars*, 2. 12. 25–6 (ed. Haury, 1. 206).

<sup>49</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 28).



their emperors and ascetics, is used to describe Julian. His paganism is associated with his madness and his tyranny, concepts that are often tied together in the epithets ascribed to him.<sup>50</sup> Like the heretics and pagans of Socrates, who are characterised as barbarians, he is compared to Shapur, the Persian shah who had fought against Constantine, and to Simon Magus, who was traditionally associated with the Samaritans, a people who acquired an execrable reputation over the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>51</sup>

This characterisation of the emperor as an irrational barbarian is further emphasised in contrast with Christian holy men. Eusebius of Rome and Julian are described as being in combat. Where Julian is barbaric, Eusebius is an improving force for his flock, 'plucking out the tares of paganism' and providing an ascetic example with his 'angelic' behaviour and appearance.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, when Maximus knocks the crown from Julian's head, it is when the latter is watching dancing girls and worshipping the 'dumb statue of a goddess'.<sup>53</sup> In contrast with the ascetic saint, the emperor is lustful, a connection between sexual mores and paganism that is also made in the pagan revolution at Antioch and in Maximus' criticisms of the gods of Homer.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the 'dumb goddess' of Julian's worship reflects two themes of Christian criticisms of paganism. The first is the negative Christian characterisation of female religious leadership: female irrationality, evoked in frenzied dancers and the goddess's inability to communicate, destroys such an object's claims to authority. And the second is his adoration of a creature rather than the Creator: an idol provides the ultimate example of pagans worshipping the created universe rather than God. Finally, Maximus' condemnation of Julian's authority, and his irrational presentation, is confirmed by the divinely sent hailstorm that follows Maximus' death, a scene borrowed from Sozomen's story of the fourth-century usurper Eugenius.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> e.g. *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 5).

<sup>51</sup> For Simon Magus, *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 17).

<sup>52</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 8 and 14).

<sup>53</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 95–6).

<sup>54</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 79 and 116).

<sup>55</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 96–7); Sozomen, *HE* 7. 24 (eds. Bidez and Hanson, 337–8).

If Julian the individual is an archetype of paganism, then the cities who welcome him, Constantinople, Antioch, and Harran, share his attributes when they acclaim him, just as Edessa and Rome provide antitheses to the tyranny of the emperor by refusing to welcome him. This presents a contrast to the *Doctrina*, where the Addai's sermons had stressed the conversion of Edessene pagans and where the paganism of Abgar's son, Manu, and contemporary pagans, could be presented as backsliding. The *Romance* does not share the *Doctrina's* obvious concern for conversion within Edessa. Instead the thrust of its representation of paganism is to argue the ascetic reputations of different cities and to emphasise Edessa's credentials as the city of Christ. Though there were still pagan processions in the city at the end of the fifth century, their presence in the Edessa of the *Romance's* author is not the major focus of the anti-pagan polemic: while Edessene pagans are by implication outsiders, unwelcome in the Christian city, it is only Edessene Jews who seem to pose a threat to the city and present a foil to its role as the city of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

The *Doctrina* had emphasised the Jews' role in the crucifixion and, in the *Protonike Legend*, their early opposition to the Christians of Jerusalem. But aspects of the text, such as the aid given to Addai by Tobias the Jew and Addai's sermon to an Edessene crowd that included Jews suggests that the milieu in which the *Doctrina* was composed still anticipated the conversion of the Jews. This expectation seems to have evaporated by the early sixth century. The *Romance* assumes that the Jews and Samaritans are in a natural condition of opposition to Christians. Thus the Samaritan rebellion is taken as an unquestioned symptom of the unjust rule of Julian. Similarly, the support of the Roman and Edessene Jews for Julian are responses to the destruction of local synagogues, and when the Jews and pagans of Antioch destroy local churches it is a natural reaction against 'the thefts of the Nazarenes'.<sup>57</sup> The *Romance* seems to understand the motives of the Jews and place itself in their position: the Jews of Tiberias expect Julian to be a messiah, because of his promises to rebuild the Temple, and they debate with the Jews of Tarsus over

<sup>56</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 30).

<sup>57</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 119).

Julian's demands for idol worship<sup>58</sup> and the Jews of Edessa complain to Julian that they have lost all of their possessions and that their homes and synagogues have been destroyed and they ask to be returned to Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

None of this understanding alters the author's vision of how Jews ought to be treated: the destruction of synagogues that the Jews of Rome and Edessa objected to were aspects of the golden age of Constantinian government that is the antithesis of their freedom under Julian. And the threats the Jews face within Edessa are a continuation of Christian government that operates in spite of the tyrant. The author justifies this position by emphasising the fickle nature of the Jews, describing them as fair-weather allies of their Christian co-citizens and perverse and inconsistent in their own religious beliefs.

The untrustworthiness of Jews as co-citizens is illustrated in Rome and Edessa. The concerns for civic prosperity of the Jews of Rome ('because of your Christianity our city may be ruined. We will join the king to accomplish his will'<sup>60</sup>) are set against the ascetic concerns of the Christian elites, who ignore Julian's threats against the long-standing prosperity of their city and are willing to give up everything to save Eusebius. This unwillingness to relinquish civic prosperity is ultimately bound into their goal of renewing the Temple and the synagogues destroyed by Christians.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the Edessene Jews' complaint to Julian after the destruction of their synagogues involves a plea to 'destroy their city' and an offer to lead in Julian's troops. This role of the Jews as an enemy within, who reveal their true nature in the context of this pagan revival, then justifies the purges that occur in Rome and Edessa (at the hands of Romans and Mesopotamians in both cases): 'they did not leave a single soul who did not worship the Cross in Edessa.'<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 109–10 and 113).

<sup>59</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 133–4). See also J.-W. Drijvers, 'The Syriac Julian Romance. Aspects of the Jewish-Christianity controversy in late antiquity', in H. Vanstiphout et al. (eds.), *All those Nations: Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East* (Groningen, 1993), 31–42.

<sup>60</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 23–5).

<sup>61</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 24).

<sup>62</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 135 and 138).



Gentiles and worship idols are seized upon by the author of the *Romance* as indications of their alliance with paganism.

Heresiological literature, such as the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis had traditionally grouped together the different opponents of Christianity, tarring them with the same brush, seeing Judaism, paganism, and 'heretical' groups such as Montanists and Arians as part of a 'family' of corruptions of orthodoxy.<sup>66</sup> This elision of Judaism and Christian heresy had become an established motif of the intellectual environment, from Athanasius against the Arians to Miaphysite criticisms of the Chalcedonians in the histories of John of Ephesus.<sup>67</sup> The same technique is employed within the narrative of the *Romance*. The decision of the Jews to worship idols and to eat with Gentiles to placate Julian is a performance of the stereotypes of the heresiologists, in which the Jews both align themselves to the pagans and admit their own disbelief in the rituals that set them apart from the rest of society.

Furthermore, though heretics are not present, the characteristics of the heretics of the ecclesiastical histories (irrationality and the perversion of their own intellectual traditions) are applied to the Jews. The chiefs of the synagogues justify their decision to worship idols because Solomon had supported foreign gods. Thus the inconstancy of the Jews regarding their own traditions is rendered a congenital feature of Judaism, an inconstancy to God that manifests itself in a perverse refusal to follow God's laws. Solomon and the Jews of the *Romance* reflect a history of inconstancy, an indication of their nature, which saw its fullest expression in the Jewish rejection of God as Christ, the criteria by which the Edessenes would expel and then destroy the Edessene Jews.

We can gain insight into the changing significance of Jews and pagans as rivals to Christianity if we compare this use of the Old Testament in the *Romance* with its employment elsewhere. Eusebius employed the Old Testament to argue for the greater antiquity of the Christian tradition to a pagan *paideia*, while Aphrahat used it to justify points in Christian theology and the author of the *Cave of*

<sup>66</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 14–20 (tr. Amidon, 48–60).

<sup>67</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 21) on the Chalcedonian patriarch Paul 'the Jew'.

*Treasures* rewrote it entirely to provide a proto-Christian tradition stretching back before the Flood.<sup>68</sup> In each of these uses we see the changing focus of the relationship between pagans, Jews and Christians. Eusebius had needed to demonstrate Christianity's antiquity to a recently pagan empire. The Jews are conflated with heretics as bringers of false knowledge and enemies of the truth but the Old Testament is embraced as part of a shared Jewish and Christian inheritance, rebutting pagan claims of Christianity's novelty.<sup>69</sup> And the author of the *Cave of Treasures* had needed to phrase his arguments in Old Testament terms to convince Jewish interlocutors or recent converts from Judaism to Christianity. But the author of the *Romance* uses the Old Testament portrayal of the house of David to illustrate a point of heresiology. The support of Solomon for foreign gods becomes a comment on the character of the Jews, as inconstant followers of God, leaving Christianity as the sole recipient of God's covenant.

The *Romance* was written in an environment where paganism no longer represented a coherent intellectual challenge to Christianity: the Eusebian chronology remained an important part of the heritage of Christianity, but its pagan opponents were defeated. The permeable religious and intellectual boundaries reflected in the eastern texts is equally alien to the *Romance*: the author is under no pressure to produce an exegesis of the Old Testament or to view the house of David in a positive light, instead he is free to treat it as a negative historical account of the Jews, from which assertions about their nature can be drawn. The number of anti-Jewish scenes and the author's use of Jewish perspectives on, and reactions against, Christian activity suggests that the text's image of anti-Jewish Constantinian government was directed against real Jewish opponents. But the manner in which the Old Testament is used and the absence of any of the expectations of conversion seen in the *Doctrina* suggests that the borderlines between Jew and Christian had become firmly drawn by the sixth century in Roman Mesopotamia. Local antipathy and

<sup>68</sup> See Droge, *Interpretations*, 181–3 on the chronological ideas of Eusebius and Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 3.3; 7.19–22; 18.4 (tr. Valavanolickal, 1. 62, 175–7; 2. 156–7). See Chapter 4 for discussion of the *Cave of Treasures*.

<sup>69</sup> See Eusebius, *HE* 1.1 and 4.15.26–9 (ed. Bardy, 1. 1 and 186).

anti-Jewish legislation seems to have combined to accentuate the difference between Christians and Jews, prompting the escalation of the Mesopotamian anti-Jewish stereotype from the original *Doctrina*, through the *Protonike Legend* to the image of 'Constantinian government' in Edessa in the *Julian Romance*.

## PART II

### Beyond the *Doctrina Addai*: A Tapestry of Empires

An important feature of earlier pieces of Mesopotamian anti-Jewish polemic, such as the *Protonike Legend* and the *Life of Barsauma of Samosata*, had been to present prototypes of anti-Jewish action for Roman empresses, in the examples of Abgar for Protonike and of Barsauma for Eudocia. As I argued above, this representation may have had its origins in the wish to oppose lenient legislation on the Jews and press for a more rigorist model for imperial action. Here one of the characteristic boundaries of a Christianity, and in the former case an Edessene ethnē, was represented as a model for action for the rest of the empire.

I suggest that a similar tactic is employed on a much larger scale in the *Julian Romance*, where Edessa's relationship with pagans and Jews is intended as much as a criterion for comparison with other cities as an emphasis on the need for state activity against Jews and pagans or to assert the boundaries of an Edessene ethnē. In this section I will focus on the representation of Edessa before turning to her relationship to other cities and lands.

We have already seen how Edessa's persecution of Jews was taken to be a continuation of persecution of the Jews under Constantine, and how it was part of a wider opposition to the supporters of Julian. This persecution of the Jews is matched by a refusal to allow Julian into their city, that emphasises the unity of all the citizenry and their denial of the civic prosperity that attracts the Jews.<sup>70</sup> The Edessenes tell Julian's emissary: 'you have come to the Christian city of Edessa, a

<sup>70</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 122–4).

stranger (ἄλλοθεν) to your pagan cult . . . its porticoes (συναγωγή) is draped in black, for Julian rules in place of Constantine . . . go to Harran, mother of paganism . . . which has adorned her streets depart from our unhappy city that laments the paganism of the king.<sup>71</sup> In this speech, Edessa is imagined as a female figure, the bride of Christ and a widow in mourning for Constantine's empire.<sup>72</sup> The widowed Edessa drapes her walls in black, in contrast to the celebration that Julian receives at Harran and uses white drapes to celebrate Jovian's arrival in the city as emperor.<sup>73</sup> Here the political cycle, in which Jovian replaces Julian, mirrors the emotional sequence of the Gospels, in which rejoicing replaces mourning at the resurrection, a sequence that is further emphasised by the image of Edessa as the bride of Christ, in which Edessa takes over the traditional role allotted to the church. Thus Edessa, bequeathed to Christ by Constantine as 'a shield of salvation', stands for the whole of Christianity, a role that Jovian, acclaimed at Edessa as Julian had been acclaimed at Harran, confirms: 'Even though Christ's faith is spread evenly across all our possessions, it is greatest in Edessa, which persisted in the faith.'<sup>74</sup>

Two male roles can be constructed around the female image of Edessa, that of the oppressive husband or rapist and that of the betrothed suitor or father. Her virtue is emphasised in terms of her resistance to the Persians, depicted here as the Assyrians of the Old Testament: 'She did not open her gates to the Assyrians when they returned three times and she will not yield to you [Julian].'<sup>75</sup> Julian's lustfulness is associated with his paganism and he is portrayed as a threat to the virtue of the chaste Edessa, waiting for her true husband in Christ.<sup>76</sup> Edessa's relationship with Julian is contrasted with the city's praise of Christ: 'She grew great and powerful through Him, his blessing became a wall that cannot be surmounted. She sees Him with the eye of faith and takes Him into herself and clothes herself with

<sup>71</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 123).

<sup>72</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 128).

<sup>73</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 123 and 229). Compare the refusal of the citizens of Rome to wear mourning garments at the attempted execution of Eusebius.

<sup>74</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 124 and 231).

<sup>75</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 123).

<sup>76</sup> e.g. his lust for the prophetess Dinosa in *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 148–9).



Him in her baptism'.<sup>77</sup> The use of this imagery of the marriage bed has parallels in Syriac poems on baptism, which describe the marriage of the church to Christ.<sup>78</sup> Edessa occupies the role that was normally filled by the church, a bride given to Christ by Constantine, standing up on behalf of all of Christian society and the inheritance of Constantine, by continuing his opposition to Jews and pagans, while Christ represents the escape from the oppression of Julian for the Christians.

The events of the later narrative can be seen as a fulfilment of this betrothal between Edessa and Christ. Julian's final words 'You have won, Galilean' portray the narrative as a struggle between Julian and Christ. And the final scene of the narrative, when the Edessenes celebrate Jovian's *adventus* with white marriage garments, allows Jovian to share in the beneficent male role that had been occupied by Constantine and by Christ as father and husband. Thus the representation of Edessa in the dialogues between the Edessenes and the emperors Julian and Jovian personalises her relationships with Julian and Christ and Jovian: the emphasis on the city's prestige as the Christian bastion of the east is supported by Edessa's position in the personal relationships of the individual protagonists. Moreover, by giving Edessa a single personality vis a vis these protagonists, the author can remove such problematic details as the presence of Jews, pagans or heretics from the city's history and compare it favourably, as an undifferentiated Christian bastion, with its rivals.

Harran serves as a foil for Edessa's prestige and identity in the narrative of Julian's arrival in Mesopotamia and the return of Jovian. Harran remained pagan until the ninth century, and the continued presence of a pagan neighbour thirty miles from Edessa meant that the condemnation of Harran persisted.<sup>79</sup> This contrast with Harran, as the opposite of everything that defined Edessa, would have lent greater importance to the *Romance's* assertions of Edessa's Christianity. But where the *Doctrina's* geographical scope was limited to Mesopotamia, the contrast between Christian and

<sup>77</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 128).

<sup>78</sup> See S. P. Brock, 'Anonymous hymn for Epiphany', *Parole de l'Orient* 15 (1989), 169–96 for this image, a development of John 3: 29.

<sup>79</sup> J. B. Segal, *Edessa and Harran* (London, 1963).

pagan takes place on a much wider scale in the *Romance*, in which Edessa stands in relation to some of the great cities of the Roman and Persian worlds: Nisibis, Constantinople, Antioch, Rome.

The *Doctrina Addai* had reflected earlier Edessene missionary activity in Sasanian Mesopotamia, legends that had prompted foundation accounts for different episcopal sees and cities within that region, exemplified by the *Acts of Mar Mari* and the *Cave of Treasures*. The account of Julian's Persian war shows that the *Julian Romance* extended the eastern interests of the *Doctrina Addai* in a similar period. Nisibis features prominently. Jovian resides there before the invasion of Persia and he, with the bishop Valgash, fast and pray for Edessa;<sup>80</sup> later Valgash tells Jovian that God has placed him at the head of the churches<sup>81</sup> and the Nisibenes follow the Edessenes example and purge the Jews from their city.<sup>82</sup>

Interestingly, this positive attitude is maintained into regions that had never been Roman territory. Though Shapur is given many of the same irrational attributes as Julian, the text has a positive attitude to the Persians: Arimhar, Shapur's lieutenant, converts and becomes a confidant of Jovian and the potential good that can lead Zoroastrians to Christianity is acknowledged by equating God with 'Hormuzd', the chief Zoroastrian deity, and by the accuracy of Zoroastrian divination.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, an important feature by which Jovian continues the achievements of Constantine is his protection of Persian Christians, transferring his Aramean captives to Armenia.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on Jovian's care for the Persian peasantry might stem from a sixth-century author's expectation that they would be Christian: thus Jovian does not devastate the irrigation canals.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the desiderata of an Edessene author regarding Rome's foreign policy are

<sup>80</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 140).

<sup>81</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 152).

<sup>82</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 158). The *Romance* also annexes a scene from the history of Nisibis, resisting three sieges by Shapur, to that of Edessa. See *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 123) and J. Fiey, *Nisibe, metropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragans des origines à nos jours* (Louvain, 1977), 24–35.

<sup>83</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 154–5, 188–9, 206–7).

<sup>84</sup> Sozomen, *HE* 2. 15 (eds. Bidez and Hanson, 70); *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 175).

<sup>85</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 164).

summarised in the peace settlement, by which Shapur promises to protect Christian worship and allow Christian commerce, concerns that reflect Edessa's position as the source of missions to the east and as a trading entrepôt.<sup>86</sup> Thus the author sees the Sasanian empire as semi-Christian, and advocates peace between the two empires, a sentiment summarised in one prophecy brought before Julian that 'East and West will rejoice and be glad (حلافتى بى همنوع).'<sup>87</sup>

The description of the Persian war in the *Romance* reflects the author's concerns for the lands to the east. These lands are the homes of trading partners and potential converts, as well as opponents of Christian emperors. This impression underlies his advocacy of peace in diplomacy: his image of ideal government omits Constantine's preparations for war against Persia, emphasising instead his protection of Persian Christians. The political thought of the text, that sees authority coming from Christ to kings, avoids the issue of Roman claims to universal rule or the expectation of a Roman conquest of Persia (though a partial exception may be made for the return of Nisibis).

By contrast, the author is much more critical of the great Roman cities close to Mesopotamia. Before Julian's arrival in Mesopotamia, Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch play the roles of Christian and pagan cities that are later filled by Edessa and Harran. Like Harran, Antioch fetes Julian's arrival, 'asserting their madness when they had the opportunity' and 'fornicating before the evil one', before the Jews and pagans destroy the churches.<sup>88</sup> In his speech to the citizens, Julian praises the city's history, of how it was honoured by Diocletian and received honours from 'mighty kings' because of its adoration for the gods. Julian promises to follow their example by 'fortifying and adorning the city'.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Julian's arrival in Constantinople after leaving Rome prompts a recollection of the city's history that is connected to largesse and tax exemption. Thus he recalls a legend of the foundation of the city by Byzas, who bequeathed the city to

<sup>86</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 222). For the role of Edessa and Nisibis in trade in the Principate see *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, 22 (ed. Rougé, 156).

<sup>87</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 149).

<sup>88</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 116–22).

<sup>89</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 118).

Germanicus.<sup>90</sup> At the end of this scene, the author notes that Julian's acclamation was only thanks to Constantinople and not to Rome: 'he was not counted as a king of the Romans because the Roman senate had not acclaimed him. He was not described as king until he was acclaimed in Constantinople.'<sup>91</sup> The implication may be that this relationship has stripped away Constantine's inheritance from the city.

In both of these examples, the pre-Christian histories of the cities prompt Julian to continue examples of previous sponsorship. A parallel tension is visible in Rome. Here Julian's emissary, Adoctus, tells the citizens that Rome's prosperity was due to paganism, but only Jews and pagans respond to his message.<sup>92</sup> The elites of Rome reply that they 'would rather change our country than our God. Better to be strangers to the power of the Romans than be strangers to our faith.'<sup>93</sup> They go on to renounce their administrative roles and refuse to harm their bishop Eusebius: 'let our city be ruined, but we will not harm the holy one.'<sup>94</sup> By refusing to accept any emperor who does not worship Christ, they distance themselves from involvement in the state and embrace asceticism.

The actions of the elites of Rome and of Eusebius are explicitly taken to be models for the whole empire, in which earlier pagan histories are denied in favour of government by Christian kings.<sup>95</sup> The actions of the Roman elites then receive a parallel in the actions of the Edessenes. Like the Romans, they declare that government comes from Christ and practise Christian government by destroying Jews and pagans.<sup>96</sup> This latter connection is strengthened by the presence of Mesopotamian monks in Rome and of Roman soldiers in Edessa. Thus Edessa repeats the example of Rome, in which the approved actions of a Christian Roman empire are established.

<sup>90</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 75–6).

<sup>91</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 99).

<sup>92</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 21).

<sup>93</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 23).

<sup>94</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 45).

<sup>95</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 31).

<sup>96</sup> See *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 54 and 123) for 'the government of Christ' at Rome and Edessa.

The *Doctrina Addai* had provided a model of Christian rule that, it implied, was followed by Constantine, and should also be followed in the sixth-century Roman empire. The *Julian Romance* also holds an exalted image of Edessa's prestige. Edessa is the city of Christ. But this relationship is not connected to Abgar, but to Constantine, and the model of Christian government that Edessa follows is already established by Rome (though Abgar's Christianity is recalled in passing with the cross used at Jovian's *adventus*). Thus even the letter of Christ and Edessa's reputation for invulnerability is transformed into a letter from Constantine.<sup>97</sup> The virtue of Edessa is still established on a Mesopotamian field, that looks towards Harran, Nisibis and the cities of Assyria, but this geography, that continues the concerns of the *Doctrina Addai*, is now set against the great cities of the eastern Roman empire, Antioch and Constantinople. Here the relative 'historical amnesia' of pre-Christian Mesopotamia is turned into an advantage in a struggle of reputations: the kind of classical histories reported by Malalas that were remembered or invented for Antioch or Constantinople are seen here as signs of a pagan past.<sup>98</sup> The only histories that are significant and prestigious are those associated with Constantine and it is this, rather than classical legends or memories of Abgar, that bring prestige to Rome and Edessa. We can explain this through the geographical arena in which Edessa's prestige was contested. The *Romance* claims the prominence of Edessa by looking to her connections to lands beyond the contemporary Roman empire, to the Christians of Sasanian Mesopotamia and to Rome herself, whose presence undermines the political prestige of a Constantinople stripped of the legacy of Constantine and endowed with a pagan past. The mutation of the letter of Christ to Abgar into the letter of Constantine reflects the same geographical arena: where the *Doctrina Addai* was concerned with Harran and Hatra in Mesopotamia, the *Romance* needed to contest the prestige of larger and further-flung cities, where the legend of Constantine provided a common currency, a symbol of orthodoxy that could not be easily evaded or usurped in the way that the epigraphic imitations of Christ's letter had been.

<sup>97</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 124).

<sup>98</sup> Malalas, 2. 7; 4. 13; 12. 20 (ed. Dindorf, 28, 78–9, 291–2).

### A Subversive Political Ideal?

The discussion of ideals of government and of civic prestige are all tied into the text's sense of the origin of all political authority with Christ. This is encapsulated in a scene after Jovian's return from Mesopotamia where, having been acclaimed by his troops and assuring himself of their Christianity. Here he refuses to wear a crown sullied by paganism until he has returned it to Christ since 'when Christ was made king over you on the Cross, the crown of our kingdom was blessed'. After praying with his army before the cross the crown descends onto his head: he receives his kingship from Christ.<sup>99</sup> This scene summarises a series of themes in the political thought of the text. Jovian is only made emperor after a popular acclamation and after he can be sure of ruling a Christian empire, prerequisites for authority that Julian had lacked. These features allow him to receive authority from Christ.

During Julian's persecutions, the text emphasises that both Rome and Edessa were ruled by Christ, rather than by the emperor.<sup>100</sup> The obedience of the cities to their true king underlies their resistance to Julian and their persecutions of Jews and pagans: just as the Roman elites embrace asceticism and withdraw from government, so Edessa presents a Christian bastion against the pagans, welcoming Roman soldiers and excluding Jews. Thus the exceptional behaviour of the two cities emphasises both the contractual nature of Roman authority, which requires Christian government, and the special prestige of these two centres, set apart as an idealised model of behaviour for the whole empire, in the case of the old capital, and through its relationship with Constantine, in the case of Edessa.

So the *Romance* has a double-edged view of Edessa. As the bride of Christ, it is an island of good Christian government in a time of persecution and as one of cities of the empire in a time of pious rule, exemplified by that of Jovian. But what purpose did this image serve, in which the prestige of Edessa also made the city a model of Christian government for the whole empire?

<sup>99</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 200).

<sup>100</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 54 and 123).

The answer may lie in unpicking the different layers of the text and their responses to a changing political situation, both within and outside the Roman empire in 504–32. Much of the text's material was drawn from the hymns of Ephraem, and from ecclesiastical history and from hagiography stretching back into the fourth century. This would account for the disjointed flow of the narrative, when scenes are broken off for excursus or characters abandoned after appearing for only one scene. The Ephraemic material provided an inspiration for the author. He pursues several themes from Ephraem's *Hymns against Julian*, whose unique manuscript is dated to 519, around the time of the text's composition.<sup>101</sup> The Ephraemic motifs used in the *Romance* include: the transition from the pious rule of Constantine to Julian's madness; Julian's Jewish alliance; the notion of persecution as a crucible to refine Christians; Jovian's succession to Constantine as an ascetic; and the duty of a Christian king to 'clear away wild animals' (Jews and pagans).<sup>102</sup> But, just as Ephraem had used the Old Testament to fuel his *madrashé*, his mediations on the history of his day, so the *Romance* uses Ephraem's ideas as a starting point and is never in thrall to them. Thus he abandons the importance of Nisibis in Ephraem in favour of Edessa.<sup>103</sup>

As we have seen, the prophetic passage that Nöldeke used to date the text, and its concern for the return of Nisibis, points towards a date of c.504–6, of Anastasius' war with Persia. The material from Ephraem or from older Greek saints' lives was subordinate to the agendas of the sixth century Syriac compiler. *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, which was written in Edessa c.507, with a coda after the death of the emperor added c.521, shares several of the concerns and assumptions of the prophecy, which confirms an early sixth-century date for the *Romance*. The *Chronicle* describes how the shah Kavad was brought to power in a palace coup, and how the Persians were driven to war by the need to pay the Hephthalites, matching the prophecy's awareness of a 'revolution' within Persia that changed the

<sup>101</sup> S. Griffith, 'Ephraem the Syrian's hymns 'Against Julian': meditations on history and imperial power', *VC* 41 (1987), 238–66, at 239–40.

<sup>102</sup> Ephraem, *Hymns against Julian*, 1.1; 1.15; 2.24; 2.19 (ed. Beck, 71, 74, 79–80).

<sup>103</sup> Ephraem, *Hymns against Julian*, 2.15 (ed. Beck, 78). Muraviev, 'Julian Romance', 199 is sceptical about the Ephraemic influence on the text.

course of foreign affairs.<sup>104</sup> The *Chronicle* also defends Anastasius from accusations that he started the war, noting that Kavad had demanded gold from the emperor and that he, pressed by other wars, had refused to do so until Nisibis was returned, matching the *Romance's* interest in Nisibis in its description of the fourth-century treaty of Jovian.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the text shares several of the ideas and prejudices of the *Julian Romance*, such as its antipathy to the Jews and the notion of Edessa as 'neither the city of Kavad, nor Anastasius but of Christ' (though it connects this to the Abgar legend rather than to Constantine).<sup>106</sup>

The *Romance's* prophetic passage relating to the *temporary* donation of Nisibis seems to address the same issue as the *Chronicle*, the attribution of blame for the end of peace on the frontier, and the *Romance* as a whole shows many of the same concerns as the pro-Anastasian *Chronicle*. However, several features of the sixth-century empire receive condemnation in the *Romance*. Thus, where the *Chronicle* had only emphasised Edessa's prestige, the *Romance* contrasts Edessa with Constantinople and Antioch, which receive specific condemnations for their pagan pasts and their collaboration with Julian. Similarly, the Samaritan revolts that are one of the symptoms of Julian's bad government punctuated the late fifth and early sixth century. In this context, the contractual relationship that the *Romance* articulates between the cities of Christ and the emperor may be intended to criticise a contemporary emperor rather than to praise him.

The most likely subject for this criticism is Justinian. His reign saw the reopening of Roman–Persian conflict in the period 527–32, partially as a result of Roman sabre rattling.<sup>107</sup> This conflict then mirrors the activity of Julian, whose reign also began with aggression on the frontier spelling deprivation for Mesopotamian trade and agriculture. Kaldellis suggests that Procopius' representation of this same war constructs a parallel between the two 'barbaric' kings,

<sup>104</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 18 and 23).

<sup>105</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 6 and 23).

<sup>106</sup> *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (ed. Wright, 58; 5 and 60–1).

<sup>107</sup> This consisted of the invasion of Iberia in the Caucasus, skirmishing between Arab federates in Mesopotamia and the fortification of Palmyra. G. Greatrex and S. Lieu, *Rome and Persia at War: a Narrative Sourcebook* (London, 2002), 2. 82–5.



Justinian and Khusrau. Similar parallels between the irrational protagonists of the *Romance*, Julian and Shapur, might suggest that the author was drawing on an image of contemporary *Kaiserkritik*, which employed pejorative comparisons between the emperor and the shah.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the comparison with the first Justinianic war is strengthened by the timing of the Samaritan revolt, which occurred in 529, immediately before the outbreak of conflict between Roman and Persian forces, matching the *Romance's* description of a revolt before Julian crosses the Euphrates.<sup>109</sup>

Another feature of Justinian's rule that may be criticised in the *Romance* is his legal initiative. Immediately after his accession, Justinian had proclaimed his intention to compile the Roman law, decrying those critics who claimed that the emperor's judgement did not constitute law (a philosophy that would be developed into the image of the emperor as 'the living law').<sup>110</sup> The *Romance* may refer to Justinian's policy in a scene when Julian is advised by the philosopher Aplatous after being defied by Eusebius. Aplatous tells him that 'the powers of the kingdom are subject to justice. If one overrides what is correct, he overturns the name of king, in which he should glory, and becomes a tyrant'.<sup>111</sup> Here Julian's tyranny lies in his attempts to alter previous government and to set himself above the established law, a criticism that might equally be levelled at Justinian. This attack is deepened by the Solomonic associations that Justinian encouraged by assuming this role as a lawgiver at the beginning of his reign. Here Solomon is not seen as a prototype for Christian kingship, but for the fickle nature of the Jews and their inclination towards paganism. Thus Justinianic propaganda is tarred by its association with both Judaism and paganism.

A final strand of the critique of Justinian in the *Romance* is connected to his Christological innovations. The text is not Christologically aware. Despite the Miaphysite bias of Mesopotamia, there is no

<sup>108</sup> A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 2004), 199–218.

<sup>109</sup> G. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532* (Leeds, 1998), 163–5.

<sup>110</sup> C. Humfress, 'Law and legal practice in the age of Justinian' in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2004), 161–84, at 162–3 and 168–9.

<sup>111</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 34–5).

Miaphysite Christology in the text.<sup>112</sup> However, immediately before the invasion of Persia in 529, the date suggested here for the text's compilation, the Chalcedonian hierarchy had made serious interventions in Edessa and Amida. Paul, the popular metropolitan of Edessa, had been driven out by Acacius, one of his own lieutenants, in 522 and a revolt by monks had been put down by troops in Amida, after which Miaphysite monks were expelled to Mardin, and then further afield.<sup>113</sup> Criticisms of Antioch and Constantinople might be explained by this context. Antioch had been a centre for Diophysite theology in the fifth century and had been the former see of Severus of Antioch until his expulsion at the accession of Justin I, prompting the *Romance* to replace Ephraem's praise for the city with invective.<sup>114</sup> And Constantinople had provided support for Chalcedon throughout the fifth century, especially because Chalcedon had guaranteed the ecclesiological prominence of the city as the new Rome. The denial of Constantinople's status as an equal of Rome, worthy to acclaim Julian, may be connected to the author's wish to oppose Chalcedon.

## Conclusions

The tone of the *Romance* as a whole, celebrating the ability of true Christians to resist persecution and of Edessa standing alone against the persecutor, while ostensibly discussing the distant past, actually carried a covert significance for contemporary Miaphysites in an era when some prominent Edessenes were prepared to support Chalcedon. The absence of Christology does not mean that the theological controversies were irrelevant to the author's intended audience.

<sup>112</sup> The suggestions of Nöldeke, 'Roman von Kaiser Julian', 284 for Miaphysite and Chalcedonian formulae in the text are too theologically ambiguous to rest any argument upon them.

<sup>113</sup> V.-L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford, 2008), 111–19.

<sup>114</sup> For Ephraem's praise of Antioch see *Hymns on Julian*, 4.1 (ed. Beck, 85). The Antiochenes accused Severus of correspondence with Jews after his expulsion, W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972), 234 and their clergy mocked the Miaphysite missionary bishop John of Tella after his capture in 538. Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 80).

Rather, the *Romance* provides an assertion of boundaries based upon the alleged past history of Edessa, in which the readers are urged to identify with the persecuted city and to identify its Chalcedonian persecutors with Jewish and pagan 'others' whose exclusion from a true Edessene identity had been long established in texts such as the *Doctrina Addai* and the *Protonike Legend*. But where the anti-Jewish tone of the *Protonike Legend* might be taken as a goad to imperial action, the selection of the story of Julian's alliance with the Jews provides the material for a more charged *Kaiserkritik*, that makes the Chalcedonian emperor an ally of the Jews. This theme had already been employed by Mesopotamian Miaphysites in the *Letter of the Jews to Marcian*, that asserts that the consequences of Chalcedonian theology expunges the guilt of the Jews: 'we have been regarded as though our fathers crucified a God. But since this synod demonstrates we crucified a man, we should be pardoned and our synagogues returned.'<sup>115</sup> Though the *Letter* is more theologically aware than the *Romance*, I suggest that both texts use earlier history to manipulate embedded local prejudice against the Jews, which had formed the backbone of the demarcation of local, Christian identity and criticism of imperial policy in the fifth century, to attack the authority of the Chalcedonian Justinian. Following the Miaphysite leaders Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbug, the *Romance* asserts that the Chalcedonians are 'the new Jews'.<sup>116</sup>

Thus the ostensible concerns of the text, to strengthen the exclusion of Jews and pagans and to enhance the prestige of Edessa on an imperial stage, are bound into a contractual model of political thought, in which the ideal emperor receives rule from God. The failure of Justinian to fulfil this Constantinian role, leaves an alternative role to Edessa, as a persecuted island of true belief and an example to other Christian cities until such time as the pious rule of the empire is restored: 'Woe to the kingdom of the Romans that has lost its kings and finds one such as this in its place'.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> L. Van Rompay, 'A letter of the Jews to Marcian on the council of Chalcedon', *OLP* 12 (1981), 214–25. Its independent circulation alongside Philoxenan material, and its appearance in Coptic as well as Syriac, suggests an early sixth-century date.

<sup>116</sup> P. Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London, 2004), 12 and Philoxenus, *Letter to the Monks*, 7 (ed. Vööbus, 54).

<sup>117</sup> *Romance* (ed. Hoffmann, 79).

## Creating Boundaries in the Miaphysite Movement

The *Julian Romance* employed the myths and self-identity of the city of Edessa to establish the city's prestige against its rivals in the Roman empire. This centrifugal tension was triggered by the Miaphysite controversy: contemporary persecution allowed the author to harness memories of previous persecutions and to portray persecuting emperors in the same light as Jews or pagans, since there is no obligation to obey an emperor unless he fulfils the criteria of a Constantinian ruler. In this way, the prejudices of Edessene Christians against Jews and pagans in their own city, against whom they defined their own identity, was projected out into the empire at large: readers were reminded that the cities that had gone over to Chalcedon in the sixth century were re-enacting earlier alliances with pagans and Jews in the fourth. Moreover, these distinctions were especially apposite given support for Chalcedon within Edessa: the men who received Chalcedonian appointments or orchestrated the emperor's will against the Miaphysites were all local men. Thus, one theme of the *Romance* is to define true Edessenes against the Jews who live among them and betray them, just as contemporary Chalcedonians threatened to do. The *Romance* uses the prestigious history of the city in the past to articulate the equation of being Edessene and being orthodox in the present.

But the Miaphysite movement was a phenomenon of the entire eastern Mediterranean. The *Julian Romance* informs us about the relationship between the mythic history of Edessa and its sixth-century self-perception, but it makes no concessions to the existence of Miaphysites in Constantinople or Antioch, cities that are portrayed

as allies of the Jews. For the *Romance*, the orthodoxy that Jovian returns to its rightful position as the imperial doctrine is preserved only at Edessa (and, at the beginning of the story, Rome). However, other texts written in Syriac are much more aware of a Miaphysite movement that is present across Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, an orthodoxy in waiting that is shared by the whole empire and the states beyond it. This chapter will investigate how the authors of these texts, hagiographers and ecclesiastical historians, conceived of the authority of the emperor and of the relationship between Mesopotamia and the empire as a whole, developing a politically charged *Kaiserkritik*. As part of this process, we will also investigate how some of the intellectual tools that had been used to demarcate an Edessene ethnē continued to be used to demarcate boundaries of communion and to demonstrate the orthodoxy of Miaphysitism.

## PART I

### **The Context for Innovation: the Miaphysite Movement**

During the late fifth and sixth centuries, the Christian world was divided, to varying extents in different places and different levels of society, over a dogmatic issue, of whether one could speak of two natures in Christ, as had been established at Chalcedon in 451, or of a unified nature. I will follow recent secondary literature in writing of these two tendencies as Chalcedonian and Miaphysite, but one should recognise that both labels conceal a spectrum of Christological positions that were frequently polarised when the debate was simplified to the level of the acceptance of Chalcedon or the presence of certain names on the diptychs. Though the debate was undoubtedly concerned with matters of high theology and the salvation of believers, what I investigate here is the emergence of distinct communities, and of different forms of political thought that accompanied them, as a result of this polarisation. Thus, the debate's tendency to become polarised around the reputations of individuals and problems over shared communion made gradually-produced boundary markers

between distinct Miaphysite and Chalcedonian communities, a process that would only be completed after the Arab invasions.<sup>1</sup>

Since my focus is upon the significance of the Christological controversies for community formation, I will summarise the ramifications of imperial policy on Christology with reference to this, rather than to their theological content per se,<sup>2</sup> and focus on the period before the reign of Maurice, when the ecclesiastical histories and hagiographies examined here were written. A generation of Miaphysite leaders, from whom later Miaphysites would claim a chain of theological descent, came to the fore initially as an extremist faction at the end of the reign of Anastasius. Philoxenus of Mabbug and the future patriarch Severus engineered the removal of the moderate Flavian from the see of Antioch in a move that dismantled the middle ground of Zeno's Henotikon of 482, which sought to address issues of Christology without invoking Chalcedon and the polarised emotions that accompanied it.<sup>3</sup> Severus and Philoxenus, under pressure to expand their clerical base and eager not to alienate potential allies, accepted formerly 'Chalcedonian' priests into communion and allowed them to retain their positions. Philoxenus even retained those who had been ordained under suspicious circumstances: for him, it was the act of ordination that made someone a priest and there could be no case for rebaptism or reordination, as had occurred with the followers of Paul of Samosata.<sup>4</sup> So, despite their refusal of the Henotikist middle-ground for theological reasons,

<sup>1</sup> For the importance of individual reputations on the diptychs see S. Brock, 'Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox in 532', *OCP* 47 (1981), 87–121, at 109, section 35. For the importance of communion in defining the difference between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites see the acclamation of Severus at Antioch ('We have desired communion for a long time') and the martyrdom of the monk Cyrus for refusing to receive Chalcedonian communion. John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 12 and 35).

<sup>2</sup> Theological summaries of the major protagonists can be found in J. Lebon, *Le Monophysisme Sévérien* (Louvain, 1909) and R. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Serug* (London, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 216.

<sup>4</sup> D. Michelson, *Practice leads to Theory: Orthodoxy and the Spiritual Struggle in the World of Philoxenus of Mabbug (470–525)* (Princeton, unpublished Phd, 2007), Chp. 7; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 227 n. 3. Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 5. 4 (ed. Brooks, 216) complains about the practice of re-annointing converts by Miaphysite splinter groups in Egypt in the 490s.

a stance that alienated many Constantinopolitan Miaphysites,<sup>5</sup> Severus and his party saw Chalcedonians as schismatics rather than heretics.

The accession of Justin I changed the fortunes of the Severan party. The re-establishment of communion with Chalcedonian Rome in 519 and the influence of the Chalcedonian lobby of the federate general Vitalian caused Severus to flee for Egypt.<sup>6</sup> The importance of these two external sources of legitimacy may have forced Justin's hand, but, at any rate, the price of papal support was the imposition of the *libellus* of Hormisdas, by which all clergy and monks were forced to sign a statement in favour of Chalcedon. This was implemented throughout most of the empire in 519, but the region east of the Euphrates was spared until 522 and Egypt ignored entirely.<sup>7</sup> This lull might reflect the imperial establishment gauging its successes against Miaphysites elsewhere in the empire before pressing on to Mesopotamia, time that was used in Edessa to organise a public denunciation of Chalcedon.<sup>8</sup>

The enforcement of the *libellus* east of the Euphrates varied in its intensity. In many places, bribery and political pressure must have worked, as it had in Syria I.<sup>9</sup> In Edessa, the bishop Paul was temporarily saved from deposition by popular unrest in 519, only being removed permanently in 522, while Amida saw a major monastic riot that forced an armed reaction.<sup>10</sup> These events, of resistance to imperial oppression, would form the core of Miaphysite historical memory in the writings of John of Ephesus, as they had in the *Julian Romance*. The region had a history of Miaphysite Christology going back to Rabbula's support for Cyril and its inhabitants were involved

<sup>5</sup> Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 230.

<sup>6</sup> L. Van Rompay, 'Society and community in the Christian East', in Maas (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 239–66, at 241.

<sup>7</sup> The refusal to put pressure on Egypt may be an acknowledgement of the emotional importance of Miaphysitism as a continuation of Alexandrian Christology in the spirit of Cyril and Dioscurus, whereas the provinces of the patriarch of Antioch were felt to be more varied in their attitude. E. Honigmann, *Evêques et evechés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VIe siècle* (Louvain, 1951), iv stresses the anti-Severan, Chalcedonian bias of Syria II and Phoenicia Maritima.

<sup>8</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 55).

<sup>9</sup> Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 50 and 111–16.

in and associated with a Miaphysite position elsewhere in the empire.<sup>11</sup> But one should not infer from this that these violent events were representative of the enforcement of the *libellus*. Indeed, Elias' *Life of John of Tella* implies that many secular elites were happy to go along with the will of the emperor.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, local clergy were prepared to switch their Christology for political advantage: John of Ephesus tells of how Addai the chorepiscopus was asked to follow the example of his metropolitan and follow Chalcedon.<sup>13</sup> It is this period, of the initial enforcement of the *libellus* east of the Euphrates, which provides the context for the compilation of the *Julian Romance*.

John of Ephesus gives us the impression that, by the 520s, the Miaphysite leadership in Syria and Mesopotamia had become increasingly restricted to the countryside and its monasteries, or in exile in Egypt or Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> This may be the context for the disintegration of the Miaphysites into rival parties following Julian of Halicarnassus and Severus during their Egyptian exile, a division that preoccupied the monastic author Daniel of Salah much more than the split with Chalcedon, and which generated serious conflicts over the patriarchate of Alexandria in the next decade.<sup>15</sup> Miaphysitism shows a tendency to fragment during periods of persecution, which may reflect the importance of state structures and resources in supporting the authority of bishops and adjudicating between rivals: Miaphysite leaders would have had to rely much more on personal charisma to maintain unity than their Chalcedonian counterparts.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> On the latter, see John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2 (ed. Chabot, 6) for the expulsion of the Amidan aristocrat Nonnus from the bishopric of Seleucia for his Christological views and John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 7) for the elision of anti-Syrian sentiment and Chalcedonian feeling in the capital.

<sup>12</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 55–6).

<sup>13</sup> *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (ed. Brooks, 1. 127).

<sup>14</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 519) tells us that only Mardin, Egypt and Persia retained their bishops after the 522 persecutions. Numerous scenes (eg. 2. 547–9 and 3. 677–83) describe the scattering of Miaphysites from their monasteries in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia to exiles in Egypt and Constantinople.

<sup>15</sup> D. Taylor, 'Miaphysite political thought' (Oxford, unpublished paper, 2004); W. Wigram, *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London, 1923), 122–3.

<sup>16</sup> In the 532 conversations Miaphysite leaders seem to have been unaware of Severus' location. If this is true, it may demonstrate the dislocation of channels of communication within the church after persecution. See Brock, 'Conversations', 115, section 4.



One reaction to this period of exile was the ordination of new clergy in Roman and Sasanian Mesopotamia by the itinerant bishop John of Tella. His hagiographers emphasise his scrutiny of candidates and his refusal to ordain the illiterate, which may indicate the poor material John had to work with, even if he did receive men from 'Cappadocia, Armenia, Sasanian Arzum and Phoenicia'.<sup>17</sup> This spread of the Miaphysite priesthood may have prompted the imperial rapprochement that followed, summoning Miaphysite priests without Severus to the capital and arranging 'conversations' with Syrian Miaphysites, an arrangement that allowed a channel of communication with potential moderates in spite of the official Chalcedonianism demanded by the *libellus*.<sup>18</sup>

The failure of this period of rapprochement, in which Severus' protégé Anthimus was briefly patriarch at Constantinople, was caused by the arrival of the Roman pope Agapetus in 536 in the capital and the petitions of disgruntled Chalcedonian monks from Jerusalem and Apamea.<sup>19</sup> Following this volte-face, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Constantinople, Menas, pressed home his advantage, declaring that 'the Miaphysites should not stand against the will of the emperor'.<sup>20</sup> But this moment of the emperor's abandonment of Anthimus also heralds the appearance of Theodora as a patron of Miaphysites, a role that has been incorrectly projected further back into the controversy.<sup>21</sup> Theodora's patronage can be seen as part of a wider programme of keeping the Miaphysite leadership in Constantinople, just as Justinian's minister John the Cappadocian acted as a patron of the Greens while the emperor sponsored the Blues, Theodosius of Alexandria was summoned to the capital and Miaphysite bishops corralled into the palace of Hormisdas.<sup>22</sup> Thus Menze

<sup>17</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 519) and Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 59).

<sup>18</sup> Brock, 'Conversations'; Van Rompay, 'Society and community', 246.

<sup>19</sup> Van Rompay, 'Society and community', 246. Also see S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, 1990), 62.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in C. Pazdernik, 'Our most pious consort given us by God'. Dissident reactions to the partnership of Justinian and Theodora, A.D. 525–548', *Classical Antiquity* 13:2 (1994), 256–81 at 260.

<sup>21</sup> Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, 207–28; *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 537–8).

<sup>22</sup> P. Bell, *Social Conflict and its Management in the Sixth Century, with Special Reference to the Reign of Justinian I* (Oxford, unpublished thesis, 2006), 147–8; Van Rompay, 'Society and community', 247; *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 607).

suggests that Theodora's 'patronage' was an attempt to prevent the ordination of new clergy by keeping different Miaphysite groups apart, which would account for the Miaphysite missionary John Hephaestu's hostility to the woman that later Miaphysite authors would look on as imperial protectress.<sup>23</sup>

However, changing imperial foreign relations seems to have altered the attitude of Justinian towards the Miaphysites. War with Persia in 540 and requests to Theodora for Miaphysite missionaries that were directed by the Ghassanids and Nubians prompted a shift in policy: the need for allies in the East, even at the cost of their ecclesiastical independence and schismatic creed, now exceeded the strategic importance of the papacy and its allies within the empire. This new political situation is the context for the ordinations of Theodore and Jacob Baradeus by the exiled Theodosius of Alexandria as bishops for the Ghassanids (and maybe for Miaphysites in the Sasanian Empire) in 542, around the same time as Longinus and Julian began their missions to Nubia and John of Ephesus received Justinian's financial support for the conversion of pagans and Montanists in Anatolia.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Justinian's attitude here could be compared to that of fourth- and fifth-century emperors to Novatian schismatics. Emperors tolerated an alternative hierarchy and concentrated their energies against pagans or 'true heretics' such as Montanists, in the hope that differences would disappear over time.<sup>25</sup> These officially sanctioned itinerant bishops essentially provided a new generation of Miaphysite leaders after the deaths of Severus and John of Tella in the 538, who were remembered in saints' lives written between 538 and 542.<sup>26</sup>

What seems to have begun as a centrally sponsored attempt to win allies against the Persians laid the ground for the establishment of a Miaphysite dual episcopal hierarchy, with Jacob extending the work of John of Tella by ordaining bishops in 553.<sup>27</sup> This further expansion was controversial within Miaphysite circles: the former patriarch

<sup>23</sup> Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, 223–6.

<sup>24</sup> Van Rompay, 'Society and community', 250.

<sup>25</sup> For Justinian's concentration against pagans and Manichees see John of Ephesus, *HE 2* (ed. Chabot, 75–7).

<sup>26</sup> Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, 229–30.

<sup>27</sup> A. Vööbus, 'The origin of the Monophysite church in Syria and Mesopotamia', *Church History* 42 (1973), 17–26, at 26; Honigmann, *Evêques*, 170–2.

Anthimus warned Jacob throughout the 540s against spawning ‘many useless children’.<sup>28</sup> And, though his ordinations may have forced concessions from the emperor, in the denunciation of the ‘Three Chapters’, and the alienation of the Western provinces, we can also trace the disciplinary problems of late sixth-century Miaphysitism to this expansion of the church based only on village churches and monasteries.<sup>29</sup> The Tritheite heresy within Miaphysitism, produced by Jacob’s disciples Conon and Eugenius in the 550s, and the schism between Paul and Peter, patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, that continued from the 560s until 616, might all be traced to the vacuum of real leadership after the death of Theodosius in 566, in which Jacob represented a ‘prophet-evangelist’, whose blessing had to be sought by all parties, but who had no real powers of adjudication.<sup>30</sup>

The imperial reaction to this relatively acephalous Miaphysite ‘church’ in the years following the death of Justinian was dominated by the needs of the emperor to establish his orthodox credentials, after Justinian’s death-bed lapse into Julianism, and his removal of his patriarch Eutychius in favour of one John Scholasticus. This need became especially acute in the context of Justin II’s ambitious foreign policy. Justin II’s requirement that the creed be read in churches and the courting of the Chalcedonian Catholic Franks are examples of this initiative, as are his organisation of a reconciliatory meeting between the Tritheites and the Severan Miaphysites, his provision of a Chalcedonian bishop for one Tritheite community and his lavish funeral for the exiled patriarch Theodosius.<sup>31</sup> Justin II can be seen

<sup>28</sup> Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 292.

<sup>29</sup> For the Three Chapters see Van Rompay, ‘Society and community’, 248. For the increasingly rural base of the Miaphysite hierarchy see Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 294–5 and 320. Further examples of the pushing of Miaphysites into the peripheries through persecution are to be found in *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 300) for the founding of tiny mountain monasteries by the itinerant clerics Addai and Abraham; 1. 229–47 for the evangelisation of Symeon ‘the mountaineer’; and 2. 621 for the scattering of Amidene monks from Samosata to ‘Arabia’ to Izla [the Dara mountains].

<sup>30</sup> D. Bundy, ‘Jacob Baradeus: the state of research, a review of sources, a new approach’, *LM* 91 (1978), 45–86, at 80–3. These quarrels are described in detail in John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 1–40; 3. 5. 1–12 (ed. Brooks, 209–10 and 253–62).

<sup>31</sup> Averil Cameron, ‘The early religious policies of Justin II’, in D. Baker (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches and the West* (Oxford, 1976), 51–69, esp. 54–5; P. Allen, ‘The

trying to perform the role of the orthodox ruler to both communities, burning books of Miaphysite theology in 566 before setting out compromise formulae which aimed to win over Miaphysites without mentioning the council.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in 568, at Callinicum on the Euphrates, his emissary Amantius agreed to all the essentials of the Severan position while avoiding mention of the council of Chalcedon itself. This *libellus*, while accepted by the bishops present, was destroyed by their monastic supporters.<sup>33</sup> This attempt at a compromise with regional authorities was followed by a similar initiative in the capital, the second Henotikon of 571, which, though it initially persuaded John of Ephesus to return to communion, ultimately met with failure.<sup>34</sup> It was in this period of attempted negotiation that John wrote his *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (568) and the first two books of his *Ecclesiastical History*, the second of which, probably written just after Justinian's death in 565, survives in excerpts in the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqin*.<sup>35</sup>

The failure of reconciliation was met by a dramatic shift in policy. Theological persuasion was now accompanied by force and the Miaphysite leaders exiled in Constantinople were imprisoned.<sup>36</sup> This initiative, which John of Ephesus blames on John Scholasticus, was associated with the reordination of Miaphysite clergy, suggesting that the patriarch saw them as heretics rather than mere schismatics.<sup>37</sup> Reading between the lines of John's account, the mixture of persuasion and threat in Constantinople and Antioch, aimed mostly against the former members of Theodora's patronage network, seems to have had some success, with the defection of

definition and enforcement of orthodoxy', in Averil Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History XIV: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425–600* (Cambridge, 2000), 811–34, at 830; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 318, citing Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, 9, 30–3 (ed. Chabot, 312–25).

<sup>32</sup> Averil Cameron, 'Religious policies', 64, n. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Wigram, *Separation*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Allen, 'Orthodoxy', 830. This is described in John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 1. 19 (ed. Brooks, 58). Concessions to the Miaphysite position are referred to as 'a mixture' that forced the objections of 'Nestorians' [Chalcedonians].

<sup>35</sup> J. Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus: a Monophysite Historian in Sixth Century Byzantium* (Gröningen, 1995), 54 dates the history to 571.

<sup>36</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 1. 3–29 (ed. Brooks, 3–40).

<sup>37</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 1. 14 and 18 (ed. Brooks, 14 and 21–3).

Miaphysite aristocrats, bishops, and clerical aids to Chalcedonian communion.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the application of imperial policy in the provinces may have taken the form of extortions against Miaphysites, rather than attempts to force communion, which might imply that it was a policy intended primarily for public consumption in the capital.<sup>39</sup>

The lapse of Justin into madness in 574 provided a respite for the Miaphysites, and for an overtaxed empire. Tiberius' refusal to persecute Miaphysites was accompanied by attacks on the pagans of Baalbek and Arian federates in the capital: like Justinian in the later part of his reign, Tiberius settled with ignoring the distinction between the Chalcedonians and Miaphysites and establishing his orthodox credentials by persecuting pagans and real heretics.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Tiberius showed himself concerned with the internal unity of the Miaphysites, rather than manipulating the weakness of a divided, 'heretical' church, he supported the long-standing attempts of the Ghassanid phylarch Mundhir to broker an agreement between the followers of Paul of Antioch and Peter of Alexandria in 580.<sup>41</sup> Tiberius' successor Maurice seems to have altered this policy, dismantling the long-standing relationship with the Ghassanids, an event that may have been prompted by their phylarch's refusal to accept Chalcedon, and turning instead to determined missionary activity amongst the inhabitants of the frontier regions with Persia, especially Georgia, and to small-scale persecutions in Harran and Edessa.<sup>42</sup> It was in this period, between c.578 and 588, when emperors restrained the persecuting urge of some of the Chalcedonian

<sup>38</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 2. 3; 3. 2. 9; 3. 2. 38; 3. 3. 19 (ed. Brooks, 57, 68–70, 103–4 and 146). However, one of these groups, a convent of Antiochene aristocrats returned to the Miaphysite Trisagion under Tiberius.

<sup>39</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 1. 32 (ed. Brooks, 42–3) on extortions from the Miaphysite bishop of Ascalon.

<sup>40</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 12; 3. 3. 27–9; 3. 3. 13 (ed. Brooks, 137–9 and 155–8).

<sup>41</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 39–42 (ed. Brooks, 218–25). This union was finally achieved under Heraclius. See D. Olster, 'The Chalcedonian-Monophysite union of 616', *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 27 (1985), 93–108.

<sup>42</sup> Allen, 'Orthodoxy', 832; Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *HE* 3. 5 and 9 (tr. Palmer, 112–18). These persecutions were probably not very widespread, since Maurice was the subject a Miaphysite saint's life after his assassination. See M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), 44.

hierarchy but when their influence under Justin still loomed large, that John of Ephesus produced the disorganised and repetitive third part of his ecclesiastical history.<sup>43</sup>

### The Structures of Miaphysitism

Throughout the sixth century, there are certain reoccurring themes that indicate something about the structure of ecclesiastical networks and the effects these had upon the debate. First, the importance of monasteries and their inhabitants: bishops tended to be drawn from monasteries and relied on monks as the organisers of their urban support in mob politics, as well as providing a ready audience for their theological works (hagiography, such as John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* seems to be directed towards such an audience). Moreover, these monastic mobs had their own momentum. They lacked family ties, whose complexities might have given laymen a motive for compromise when marriage crossed confessional boundaries or when material security was threatened in times of persecution.<sup>44</sup> Instead their identity was drawn from their intellectual and ascetic inheritance of masters and disciples, which accounts both for the concentration of the debate upon personal reputations and upon the names on the diptychs, and also for occasions when bishops willing to compromise were forced to back down by monastic mobs (as Egyptian bishops had been forced to do in the fifth century, and as occurred at Callinicum).<sup>45</sup>

Secondly, I wish to highlight the propensity of the Miaphysites to splinter under persecution. The emergence of Julianists and Tritheites, and the schism between Alexandria and Antioch, all point to the

<sup>43</sup> Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 55) and Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *HE* 40 (tr. Palmer, 140) both suggest that lay elites could be much more prepared to compromise than a clergy rooted in local monasteries.

<sup>45</sup> Bell, *Social Conflict*, 133–6. See also Brock, 'Conversations', 109 section 35 citing the emperor's comment to the Syrian bishops in 532: 'you are saying nothing unorthodox, but you do not want to communicate with us because of scruples over names in the diptychs'. The distinctions between the Chalcedonian and Miaphysite hierarchies may have also been maintained because re-union might threaten the positions of incompetent or vulnerable incumbents. John of Ephesus, *HE*. 3. 2. 3 (ed. Brooks, 124) suggests this with regard to John Scholasticus.

difficulty in regulating the church in terms of doctrine and authority. External sources of adjudication, provided under Justin II and Tiberius, were sought across different Miaphysite communities. In this sense, the imperial office had a crucial centripetal function that encouraged continued loyalty, that existed apart from, and in addition to, the ideas of Miaphysite Roman citizens about the ideal characteristics of an emperor (eg. persecution of Jews and ‘true heretics’; victory in war; low taxation). It is the mutation of this imperial right to adjudication that will form the spine of Chapter 7, in which we will examine the attitudes of Miaphysites to the politics that surrounded the Roman empire.

Thirdly, the course of the controversies shows us that the Miaphysite movement was scattered across the whole eastern empire. Even if its leadership was frequently drawn into Constantinople and its main centres of support remained Mesopotamia, Syria I, and Egypt, there were also Miaphysite populations living along the coasts of the Aegean and Asia Minor, for whom John Hephaestu ordained priests in the late 530s, playing the role of a western John of Tella in a zone encompassing Sardis, Chios, Tarsus, Rhodes, Cyprus and Caesarea Maritima. Indeed, the very existence of a Palestinian, from a province seen as part of a wider Syria by his hagiographer, trained in Gaza and ordained bishop in Egypt, whose sphere of activity was the sea-route from Alexandria to Constantinople, testifies to the inter-provincial nature of the controversy.<sup>46</sup> The career of Severus is similarly connected to the great port cities of the eastern Mediterranean. A native of Pisidia, after studying at Alexandria he trained at the law school of Beirut before his victory at the synod of Sidon in 511 and his election to the see of Antioch.<sup>47</sup> And, as Allen has emphasised, Greek was the language in which the great debates of the Miaphysite controversy was conducted: the survival of Severus’ sermons in Syriac is only a symptom of his position on the losing side, which gradually retreated away from the Greek-speaking littoral.<sup>48</sup>

Yet having emphasised the inter-provincial, Mediterranean backgrounds of the missionaries and debaters of Severus’ generation, there

<sup>46</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 527 and 535–7).

<sup>47</sup> Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, 5–11.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 5; Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 11).

is a shift in the spheres of activity of prominent Miaphysites of the later sixth century. Frend has drawn attention to the rural displacement of the Miaphysite hierarchy in the provinces where it received its strongest support: synods were held in village monasteries and the Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch lived between Aleppo and Mabbug, rather than in the great city.<sup>49</sup> The generation after Severus was subject to a rural displacement by imperial persecution that did not prevent missionary work, but it did prevent men like Peter of Callinicum, Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch, from ever visiting Antioch itself, let alone acquiring the legal and cultural education that Severus received at Beirut.<sup>50</sup> So, while there was no intrinsic connection between the culture of Edessa or Syriac-speakers and Miaphysitism, the displacement of Miaphysite leaders into a Syriac-speaking hinterland gradually increased Syriac's prominence within Miaphysitism from the sixth century, into the period of Arab rule.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the educational isolation of different Miaphysite groups accounts for the pattern of the movements of internal schisms in the late sixth century, with the schism of the Miaphysite sees of Antioch and Alexandria. In this environment, in the period after Justin II's persecution of 571, figures such as Jacob Baradeus and John of Ephesus straddled a divided movement, representing, in the first instance, a charismatic authority valued by all or, in the second, the continuation of Theodora's Constantinopolitan patronage network and a vision of a history for a united Miaphysite movement as a viable orthodoxy in waiting.

## PART II

### Miaphysite Hagiography

The rest of this chapter will focus on the fluctuations of Miaphysite self-perception through the later stages of this religious and political

<sup>49</sup> Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 294–5 and 320.

<sup>50</sup> Severus' education is described in Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*.

<sup>51</sup> Thus, by the twelfth century, Michael the Syrian can equate the Syrian Orthodox with a 'Suryaye' people. However, prominent Edessene Chalcedonians would continue to employ Syriac. See below.



controversy. This self-perception was formed as much through looking back at long-established ascetic traditions and criteria for virtue and on the history of the early sixth century as on contemporary events. John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* is central to this investigation. Its author was closely involved in Theodora's patronage network of the 540s and a member of the Miaphysite leadership in exile in Constantinople, through periods of imprisonment under Justin II, until his death in the late 580s. In John's ecclesiastical history in 578–88 he was attempting to draw together a movement that had become increasingly provincial, where different local leaders had become unwilling to cooperate, by providing them with a shared history and a shared hope for a Miaphysite ruler. By contrast, hagiography, and John's hagiographic collection in particular, provided Miaphysite writers with the intellectual weaponry to attack the emperor's orthodoxy and to establish the religious prestige of a particular territory, the home of the hagiographer's saints.<sup>52</sup>

However, despite the sense of territoriality inherent in John's hagiographic collection, I do not think it is useful to understand it, nor his sense of Mesopotamia's ascetic history, as 'nationalistic'. The position of historians of the early twentieth century that Miaphysitism was a manifestation of Syrian 'nationalism' was effectively demolished by Jones as an anachronistic attempt to read modern situations onto older sources.<sup>53</sup> We can approach this debate in two ways. The first is to note with Taylor, in his study of the Psalm commentaries of Daniel of Salah, that Jones, and the earlier historians that he criticised, were primarily commenting on state-sponsored texts or texts which aspired to a wide distribution: if 'heretics' did express political dissidence then they are more likely to have done

<sup>52</sup> John's history and hagiography have been discussed by Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus* and Harvey, *Asceticism* respectively. However, the latter is inclined towards description rather than analysis.

<sup>53</sup> E. Woodward, *Christianity and Nationalism in the Later Roman Empire* (London, 1916); Wigram, *Separation*; A. H. M. Jones, 'Were late Roman heresies national movements in disguise?', *JTS* n.s. 10 (1959), 280–98. However, Jones does suggest that Armenians and Goths did connect their religious and 'national' identities. The absence of independent states in sixth century Mesopotamia does not imply that 'variant' ideas of authority and community might not have accompanied 'variant' religious practice.

so in devotional texts intended to be safely read by a smaller audience.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, as I argued in Chapter 3, to reject the anachronistic imposition of nationalist paradigms does not make a case for the absence of all forms of 'group separatism'. To reject an *a priori* connection between religious and linguistic difference and political separatism does not mean that writers did not perceive or assert connections between territoriality, inherited myths, language, and religious practice in other ways, that provide examples of centrifugal forms of identity within the Roman empire but that do not intend political separatism.

Hagiography provided an established model for the criticism of heretical emperors that had been honed during the third-century persecutions and the Arian controversies. Employing the language of ethnography and heresiology, it could contrast the self-control of a saint such as Athanasius' Antony with the irrationality of heretics, even with a heretical emperor, and praise the struggles of 'barbaric' saints excluded from the political mainstream. As such, hagiography and hagiographic tropes had been employed by the exiled Athanasius to attack those allied to the government rather than to holy men; to criticise those who relied on force over persuasion to convince others, and to define as heretics those who act against the orthodox, especially refusing to respect orthodox ascetics: 'to scourge Christians is the act of a Pilate.'<sup>55</sup> The sixth century had seen the emperor's ever-increasing reliance on a pious mandate that simultaneously drove and was legitimised by imperial involvement in religious affairs.<sup>56</sup> As this reliance expanded with the involvement of the emperor and his clerical officials in determining 'orthodoxy' on a wide variety of intellectual subjects, his vulnerability to hagiographic criticism

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, 'Miaphysite political thought'.

<sup>55</sup> *Arian History*, 14, 33–4, 41, 55 (ed. PG 25, cols. 711, 732–3, 741).

<sup>56</sup> For the merging of ascetic and imperial images see C. Rapp, 'Comparison, paradigm and the case of Moses in panegyric and hagiography', in Mary Whitby, *The Propaganda of Power: the Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998). For involvement in religious affairs other than the Christological controversies see Humfress, 'Law', 167–8 for Justinian's religious mandate for compiling and, in effect, altering the civil law, and R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London, 1982), 197–8 for the definition of an orthodox position on the presence of pre-existent matter before the Creation.

increased. Hagiographers could employ their criticisms of the emperor using established *topoi*, following such examples as Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, in texts that could be secretly circulated amongst sympathetic, frequently monastic audiences.

But if hagiography provided a suitable vehicle for a persecuted group to criticise an emperor and to circulate this criticism, how was the hagiography of John of Ephesus and other Miaphysite hagiographers connected to the pre-existent culture of ascetic writing within Syria and Mesopotamia? What connected this hagiography to the ascetic histories of the early sixth and fifth centuries? The answer to these questions focuses on the boundary markers that had been adopted for an Edessene ethnē in the fifth century, principally on the distinctive ascetic culture and history that, to the authors of the *Doctrina Addai* and the *Julian Romance*, separated the city from its more pagan neighbours and from Edessa's own Jews. While John's vision of Mesopotamia is wider than these earlier texts, the chosen land of his hagiographic collection is similarly bounded by its inherited ascetic traditions. This gives his heroes a pious high ground from which to criticise the emperor, as a tyrant who has broken his contract with his people or as a barbaric heretic lacking in self-control, and to demarcate the proper behaviour of Mesopotamians themselves, in painting Amida, the ascetic capital of the whole 'East', as guardians of a Miaphysite orthodoxy on behalf of the wider world. In the following sections I consider John's treatment of his Mesopotamian territory and its communities, before turning to the treatment of imperial authority that accompanied it.

### The Chosen Land: Geographical Polemic in John of Ephesus

John creates a sense of Mesopotamia's ascetic prestige and territorial distinctiveness both through the genre he adopts, the hagiographic collection, and through the distinctive ascetic practices he describes. This section will investigate how these ideas of doctrinal affiliation, inherited prestige and territorial definitions borrowed from or opposed the representations of other writers. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* adopts an unashamedly provincial focus. The vast majority

of his ascetic heroes are from convents in the vicinity of Amida in Mesopotamia I. Of the seventy or so ascetics mentioned in the work, only fourteen come from outside the Mesopotamian provinces: three from Armenia, two from Persia, one from Damascus, three from Sophanene, two from Antioch, one from Cappadocia, one from Samosata, one from Maypherkat and one from Alexandria. The reader is left with the impression that Amida is the ascetic centre of 'the East' of his title. Moreover, those saints who come from elsewhere are frequently 'Syrian by race', members of a greater Syria that looks towards Edessa and Amida. Thus John Hephaestu, a native of Gaza, is a Syrian, as is Z'ura, a native of Sophanene in Armenia IV.<sup>57</sup>

This geographical usage is further complicated by John's use of *gensa Suryaya*. This sense of a Syrian race seems to be primarily geographic. Language is mentioned surprisingly little in the text. Two Caucasian groups do provide examples where language and race are identified, in the case of the Armenians and the Urtaye (a Caucasian ethnic group), which are also territories distinguished from Syria (Lives 20 and 52).<sup>58</sup> Thus John of Beth Urtaye is called an Urtaya, 'because he spoke their language, though he was, by birth, a Syrian'.<sup>59</sup> But in the world further south, the world where Greek, Syriac, and other Aramaic dialects were all intermingled, the lines seem much more blurred. If a native of Gaza can be a member of the *gensa Suryaya*, but a Christian from Arzun in Sasanian Mesopotamia is not (Lives 25 and 26), then, though he mentions the native language of neither, I suspect that his definition of *gensa Suryaya* is primarily geographic: for John, Suryaye are primarily those who live in 'the East' rather than those who speak Syriac or another dialect of Aramaic.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 527).

<sup>58</sup> For the territorial distinction between Armenia and Syria see *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 294). His inclusion of Zu'ra, an inhabitant of Armenia IV, as a Suryaya suggests that this distinction is based on language and ecclesiastical administration, rather than on Roman administrative units.

<sup>59</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 3. 208).

<sup>60</sup> However, I follow Brooks in assuming that John's statement that deacons born in Armenia, Persia, Ingilene and Maypherkat are 'Suryaye by birth', *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 659), is a slip of the pen, irreconcilable with the distinctions he draws elsewhere.

Some Miaphysite writers and propagandists had been keen to contrast Greek and Syriac by presenting the former as the language of the world and the latter as a Christian language uncorrupted by material uses. Thus Elias' *Life of John of Tella* presents Greek education as one of the signs of the saint's wealth, along with his fine clothes and food, which he rejects in favour of learning the Psalms in Syriac in secret, instead of the 'useful tuition in foreign languages' intended by his mother.<sup>61</sup> For Elias, the saint's barbaric language gave him purity in the same way as his barbaric dress. Similarly, Philoxenus of Mabbug's attempts to inject more exact philosophical language into Syriac during his translation of the Bible, may also be connected to a wish to free Syriac-speakers from dependence on Greek.<sup>62</sup> This translation initiative by a major Miaphysite theologian may have been intended to harness the prestige of Syriac as a Christian language and attach this to the Miaphysite movement. But, if so, John does not seem to have felt comfortable with the emphasis on Syriac to the exclusion of Greek. Whilst the Greek education of one of his saints is used as an indication of his wealthy upbringing, he does not reject it in later life, and Greek is represented as a useful missionary tool.<sup>63</sup> Thus one saint, Tribunus, learns Greek alongside the Psalms to act as an interpreter for a monoglot companion and Jacob Baradeus is called 'a missionary amongst Greeks and Syrians'.<sup>64</sup> Since John's hagiography spans the whole empire and is concerned with an imperial orthodoxy, John, whose own Syriac is peppered with Greek technical terms, is reluctant to contrast Christian Syriac with Greek, the language of the pagan past: both are languages of a Christian present.

Similarly, John is reluctant to employ the kind of Old Testament histories that had been used by Ephraem or the author of the *Cave of Treasures* to emphasise the antiquity of their homelands, preferring instead a 'pagan' Greek story, which he shared with Malalas, of the

<sup>61</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 39–42).

<sup>62</sup> A. De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbug, sa vie, ses écrits et sa théologie* (Louvain, 1963), 122.

<sup>63</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 284).

<sup>64</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 660–3); *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 695).

foundation of Syria by one king Suros during the Trojan Wars.<sup>65</sup> Histories such as Ephraem's were still recalled in sixth-century Mesopotamia: the *Life of John bar Aphthonia* of 542 states that its hero was 'a pearl greater than beryl or amethyst produced by Edessa . . . next to the land of Abraham'.<sup>66</sup> John avoids the praise of specific cities and of the Syriac language because of his broader focus. Unlike the *Julian Romance*, with its narrow focus on Edessa, a city with a well-established legendary history, John's hagiographies are centred on his native Amida, which lacked Edessa's impressive histories and reputation for invulnerability. Instead of histories rooted in the Old Testament or the reign of Constantine, he seems to have been happy to preserve a pagan, Greek history because it possesses a sense of Syria as a distinctive territory, without being connected to the Christian histories of specific cities.

Not all hagiographers pursued John's model. Another hagiography with regional concerns, the anonymous *Life of Jacob Baradeus*, gives 'Syria' a definite centre in Edessa. It is 'the excellent Suryaye' who face Khusrau's invasion and Syria which is filled with priests and bishops by the saint and which sorrows at his death.<sup>67</sup> But it is Edessa's resistance to Khusrau in particular that the author presents as Jerusalem resisting Sennacherib at Jacob's prayers, while Amida is relegated to being an example of divine chastisement, a city struck by madness in punishment for its multiple defections to the Chaldeonians.<sup>68</sup> John's decision to present a whole region dominated by Amida, a schema in which he cannot so easily incorporate myths specific to Edessa, is part of a polemical manipulation of geography and myth, in which he can select certain aspects of the earlier

<sup>65</sup> Ephraem, *Hymns on Julian Saba*, 4. 9–10 (ed. Beck, 46). See Malalas, 2. 8 and 8. 12 (ed. de Boor, 31 and 199) for the first report of Suros. J. Van Ginkel, 'Aramaic brothers or heretics? The image of East Syrians in the Chronography of Michael the Great (d. 1199)' (unpublished paper, Kotayyam, 2006) discussed the transmission of the legend to the *Chronicle of 846*, the *Zuqnin Chronicle* and Michael the Syrian, and suggests that a lost piece of the first part of John of Ephesus' history was their most likely common source.

<sup>66</sup> *Life of John Bar Aphthonia*, 2 (ed. Nau, 114).

<sup>67</sup> *Life of Jacob Baradeus* (ed. Brooks, 255, 262, and 267–8).

<sup>68</sup> *Life of Jacob Baradeus* (ed. Brooks, 259 and 262).

invented histories of Edessa while stripping them of their local significance.

John's sense of geographical boundaries and his selection of his saints do not necessarily reflect a popular image of the geography and history of Syrian asceticism. Instead, we might view it as an imagined territorial unit that drew on the Miaphysite leanings of some of its inhabitants to suggest the existence of a Miaphysite 'East', centred on Miaphysite areas and excluding Chalcedonian ones. In Chapter 2 we saw how Theodoret included charismatic ascetics from Mesopotamia, such as Jacob of Nisibis, and included them in a 'Syrian' tradition of asceticism while transferring his hagiographies location from Mesopotamia to Syria I and II, where there was more local support for his Antiochene Christology. He had based this ascetic history on earlier models set in Egypt, both to challenge his theological opponents and to establish a Christian territorial identity for Syria. A similar twisting of geography and ties of ascetic tradition occurs in Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, where he expunges all memory of the Miaphysite history of the region recorded in Syriac texts such as the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, and, in doing so, tries to establish an independent territorial identity for Palestine that mirrored the creation of the patriarchate of Jerusalem and avoided the issue of Miaphysite domination of much of greater Syria. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* exists in this discourse of the Syrian hagiographic collection: there was an ongoing debate about the ecclesiastical-geographical boundaries of 'Syria', and the consequences of the region's shared history when the literary model of the hagiographic collection, which had been developed for Egypt, an area much easier to define in terms of territory, was applied in the diocese of Oriens.

The hagiographic collection, because the ascetics they described were associated with different local followings and different theological and ascetic traditions, could present the geography and religious history of a region in a polemical format. Just as other authors used the genre to write a prestigious and selective history of their regions, John's account provided a slanted vision of the ascetic history of 'the East'. First, he places Amida at the centre of the East as a whole: most of the saints come from monasteries in the environs of these cities and the collection gives a continued history to monastic communities

that have long since been physically scattered.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, these Mesopotamian ascetics provide orthodox exemplars to the whole Roman empire of John's day, from Constantinople to Alexandria to Arabia, and also into Sasanian Mesopotamia and Ctesiphon, whether as missionary bishops or as exiled monastic communities. Finally, this Mesopotamian asceticism is bound up with the Miaphysite controversies themselves. The orthodoxy which they indicate through their deeds is a Miaphysite one and the persecution which they undergo is part of their asceticism, making them successors to the tradition of the martyrs in a way that the more serene, isolated ascetics of Palladius or Theodoret could not be. Moreover, because a hagiographic collection selects an orthodox history and orthodox geographical boundaries for its chosen region, John's text builds a series of connections between the East as a whole and Mesopotamia, as its ascetic capital, and between the ascetic practice of his heroes and Miaphysitism. This orthodox history and geography that makes Mesopotamia a Miaphysite example to the rest of the Roman world necessarily clashes with other ideas of history and geography, such as the suppression of Chalcedonian Antioch from John's vision of 'the East' and silence on Miaphysite failures in contemporary Palestine. Though he is more allied to Amida than to Edessa, John's hagiographic collection, like the *Julian Romance*, has a sense of the chosen land that eclipses other places in ascetic prestige, protecting orthodoxy for the empire as a whole.

### Ascetic Custom in Mesopotamia

In addition to the sense of territory inherent in the genre itself, John also describes ascetic practices that were peculiar to Syria-Mesopotamia, even those which had fallen under suspicion of heresy in previous generations. We should remember that John was writing about a monastic world that had undergone a displacement from

<sup>69</sup> e.g. *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 611–21) the convent of the Amidenes, united by 'one order, one habit, one concord, one serenity, one quietude and one love', a unity that mirrors their Christological beliefs for which, ironically, they have been scattered from Melitene to Arabia.



cities such as Amida to the villages, and that orthopraxy was consequently harder to enforce. Moreover, the central patronage that had motivated Rabbula of Edessa to ban many local practices as heretical, and to embrace the popular Miaphysitism of his day, had evaporated. In this environment, it proved easier for John to praise many of these continuing practices as symbols of piety peculiar to Syria, further enhancing the distinctiveness of his chosen territory. Several of his saints give out *hnana*, the dust of saints mixed with earth and water, to heal their petitioners, the same custom that had been recorded in the Syriac *Life of Symeon*.<sup>70</sup> This practice had clearly courted controversy in the fifth century: Theodoret deliberately avoids mentioning *hnana* in his own *Life of Symeon*, and Rabbula's *Canons for the Monks* had controlled the distribution of similar magical substances such as holy oil, as part of the bishop of Edessa's attempts to tailor local practices according to norms across the church as a whole.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, though John shares Rabbula's Christology, he is more concerned with emphasising the distinctiveness of local custom than pushing his saints into universally acceptable models.

A similar analysis can be applied to his nazirite saints, who, like Theodoret's Romanus, refuse to cut their hair. This custom had also been banned by Rabbula, but, here again, John expressly presents this longstanding but contentious practice as the distinguishing characteristic of two ascetics, John the Nazirite, who withdraws from his monastery at Zuqin when its leading monks become Chalcedonian, and Sergius, who is 'shaved of the hair [that marked his] *naziruta*' when captured by the Chalcedonians.<sup>72</sup> It is notable that the Arians' lack of respect for orthodox virgins in Alexandria had been a particular concern of Athanasius.<sup>73</sup> This technique, of emphasising the boundaries between groups by drawing attention to their different value systems and centres of devotion, may be present here in John's description of Sergius. In failing to recognise Sergius' holiness and cutting off his hair, the Chalcedonians deny both the importance of

<sup>70</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 38 and 61 (tr. Doran, 122–3 and 140–1).

<sup>71</sup> See Theodoret's omission of Symeon's use of *hnana*. I discuss this in Chapter 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (ed. Brooks, 1. 39–48 and 1. 104). I disagree with Brooks' gloss that his distinctive hairstyle was a tonsure.

<sup>73</sup> *Arian History*, 55 (ed. PG 25, col. 760).

his ascetic activity and the locally significant manner in which it was shown. By oppressing this custom, the Chalcedonians show themselves to be outside this indigenous tradition.

The third of these traditions with specific local resonance is the portrayal of *ihidayuta*, of lone asceticism. We have seen in the *Historia Religiosa* how Theodoret tried to subvert aspects of Syrian *ihidayuta* by making the great lone ascetics of the past the founders of cenobitic monasteries, as part of a wider attempt to tame ascetic practice and place it under episcopal control.<sup>74</sup> Most of John's ascetics did exist in a cenobitic environment. But he does emphasise individual ascetics who practise their religion alone, either within a cenobitic environment or after exile by the Chalcedonians. Thus two of the pairs of saints with which John opens the *Lives*, Habib and Zu'ra and Simeon and Sergius are lone ascetics in preparation for their public ministries in their villages, whether this is as stylites or, like Sergius, holed up in a house (*Lives* 1, 2, and 5). Similarly, he praises the lone asceticism and constant wanderings of the *ihidaye* Addai and Abraham, though he is also careful to defend them against any of the accusations of scrounging that had been made against the Messalians.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps the most striking of all of these *ihidaye* are the 'holy fools', who would become a popular theme for hagiography in the Middle Byzantine Period and retained their Syrian associations even after the Arab Conquests. John's examples are a pair of Antiochene mimes, who are taken to be prostitutes until it is discovered that they are secretly in a white marriage and spend all night in prayer, and 'a poor stranger' who comes to a monastery and refuses to sit at the high table with the abbot or to answer theological questions, despite his obvious age and holiness (*Lives* 17 and 52). These figures are characterised by their holiness and their anonymity, and are

<sup>74</sup> I discuss *ihidayuta* in Chapter 2, but see especially the discussions of S. Griffith, 'Asceticism in the church in Syria: the hermeneutics of early Syriac monasticism', in V. Wimbush, and R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), 220–45 and id., 'Monks, "singles," and the "sons of the covenant." Reflections on Syriac ascetic terminology', in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft*, *Studia Anselmiana* 110 (Rome, 1993), 141–60.

<sup>75</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 120 and 299).

Christomimetic in the sense that they provide society as a whole with an opportunity to act to a stranger as they would to Christ.

By including these *ihidaye* as supporters of the Miaphysite movement and patrons for the villages and monasteries of Mesopotamia, John pursues a strand of Syriac writing that had become disenchanting with the wealth accumulated in cenobitic monasticism, that had used the language of an earlier Mesopotamian 'proto-monasticism' to make its case heard. Thus the fifth-century ascetic writer Ishaq of Antioch had named the ascetics as 'the courageous men standing in the vanguard' and lamented that monks had built up plantations in the mountains, and possessions in the wilderness.<sup>76</sup> John does not go as far as Ishaq. He does not propose that it would be good or possible to dismantle cenobitic monasticism, and approves of the role of his ascetics and the establishment of *bnay qyama* in the formalised settlement of the mountains of Izla (Life 16). But he does praise his lone ascetics as *ihidaye* in the manner of Ephraem's Julian Saba, and draws attention to those ascetic practices of his saints that had a long history distinctive to Mesopotamia. Some of these had already been integrated into the hagiographic writing and legislation of an Edessene establishment, such as Rabbula's description of a holy fool, *The Man of God of Edessa*<sup>77</sup> or his *Canons for the bnay qyama*, others, such as *hnana* and *naziruta* had remained popular despite official condemnation, but, in the conditions of Chalcedonian persecution, they all provided symbolic material that could be used to show John's saints participating in ascetic traditions peculiar to the area that fulfilled earlier models of ascetic behaviour.

### PART III

#### Contradictions of Authority

Thus John's hagiography demarcates the boundaries of 'the East' and establishes Amida as its religious centre. Like the *Doctrina Addai*, the

<sup>76</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2. 147–50.

<sup>77</sup> See Drijvers, 'Rabbula, the Man of God'.

distinctiveness of the author's chosen land is emphasised using certain ascetic customs. That John's selection of practices is wider reflects his broader audience, since his saints are intended as ascetic models for a wider area than just a single city. But John shares the sense of the *Doctrina Addai* and the *Julian Romance* that Mesopotamia's ascetic culture sets the land apart from its neighbours and made its ascetics a suitable 'guardian of orthodoxy' for the wider world.

John's emphasis upon the Miaphysite history and territorial distinctiveness of Mesopotamia was necessary because it was challenged. We have already seen how several of the 'persecutors' of Mesopotamia in John's history, such as Asclepius, Paul 'the Jew', Abraham bar Kayli, or the various bishops of Amida were local men. Similarly, the author of the Edessene Chronicle in the 540s, recording the city's history from the reign of Abgar VIII until that of Justinian, was quite happy to expunge all positive record of Miaphysitism. It records civic patronage to the city by past kings and bishops and has been seen by Palmer as an invitation to the emperor to contribute to this prestigious tradition.<sup>78</sup> At any rate, the chronicle is notable for its praise for the constructions of Ibas, Rabbula's Diophysite opponent in the 420s, and for Justinian's inscription of Chalcedonian formulae on the doors of the cathedral and its condemnation of the actions of the Miaphysite Anastasius in expelling Euphemius, patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>79</sup> Thus there was no automatic allegiance of a greater Syria, of Mesopotamians, or of Syriac-speakers to the Miaphysite cause. Imperial patronage and loyalty to the will of the emperor might outweigh local allegiances. And multiple histories of the region persisted, reflecting the fluctuating allegiances of its fifth-century bishops. Much as texts such as the *Julian Romance* appealed to the eternal 'orthodoxy' of Edessa, the *Chronicle of Edessa* shows that Diophysite leanings of the School of Edessa and of bishops such as Ibas were not forgotten.

When John's hagiography or the *Julian Romance* emphasise the continuities between an older Mesopotamian ascetic history into

<sup>78</sup> A. Palmer, 'Procopius and Edessa', *Antiquité tardive* 8 (2000), 127–36.

<sup>79</sup> *Chronicle of Edessa*, 58, 77, 88 (ed. Guidi, 7–9). The absence of Addai from the opening passage on Abgar, noted by S. Brock, *An Introduction to Syriac Literature* (Kotayyam, 1997), 45, may also be polemical. It is possible that, as we saw in the *Acts of Mar Mari*, the figure of Addai had become associated with the Miaphysite cause.

contemporary controversies, they aimed to fuse the idea of being Edessene, or a member of the *gensa Suryaya*, with being Miaphysite. They used pre-existent boundary markers of their ethnic and attached them to their religious confession. By presenting Chalcedonians as outsiders, the potential boundaries of Christological confession were asserted as active boundaries between different communities.<sup>80</sup> In a social environment where Chalcedonians and Miaphysites might worship together, John's *Lives*, and other Miaphysite hagiographies, sought to present Miaphysites as the sole recipients of the orthodox inheritance of the past, and to both deny Chalcedonian versions of the history of the controversies and the pull of Constantinople upon their loyalties.<sup>81</sup> This section will examine the various ways in which Miaphysite hagiographers opposed the attractions of Chalcedon as part of an imperial patronage network.

The sense of Mesopotamia's distinctive ascetic heritage that we examined in the last section is used by John to assert a place for selected Miaphysite ascetics as leaders. They are, in Shamsul's terms, the arbitrators of what is necessary to be a good *Suryaya*. Thus Maro the stylite, a saint who had healed John as a boy, presents us, in his lamentation over the destruction of his homeland by the Huns in 515, with a society centred around its (Miaphysite) ascetic and clerical leadership, to which John and contemporary ascetics are heirs: 'What will happen to your churches and monasteries? What will happen to your priests and believing people? Chastise us not in anger, O Lord.'<sup>82</sup> Similarly, John's image of Maro is as a central force for social order, who tells 'women and laymen' to 'remain in their stations and restrain from oaths, blasphemy and adultery, acting according to the gentleness he [Maro] disseminated'.<sup>83</sup> In stressing

<sup>80</sup> Other examples of this activation of latent boundaries in the controversies are provided in John Rufus, *Pleriphories*, 38–40 (ed. Nau, 81–91), focusing on the avoidance of Chalcedonian holy places and John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, 12, 26, 178, 188 (tr. Wortley, 10, 17–18, 147–8, and 163) which concentrates on the dangers of heretical communion.

<sup>81</sup> For joint worship see *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 102).

<sup>82</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 78).

<sup>83</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 79). A similar example of a saint providing a positive moral influence on his community is seen in the self-controlled John of Tella banning a troupe of 'lewd dancers' and cautioning his city to follow his disciplined example. Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 56).

his ascetics as sources for order and for divine intervention against barbarians, he presents a model of complete societies looking towards Miaphysite exemplars, rather than a reality of mixed congregations and contradictory allegiances. In John's hagiographies, the experience of persecution has driven his monks from their isolated asceticism and into the cities, where they attempt to continue their customs despite persecution.<sup>84</sup> The charitable initiatives of these monks in cities such as Amida are presented as the continuation of earlier connections between local monasteries and the city, and in emphasising the continuity of proper protocols for joining the monastery, and in presenting the very experience of persecution as part of an ascetic formation, John makes his monks as the traditional exemplars for the city, the leaders of a Miaphysite *politeia*.<sup>85</sup>

His image of an ascetic leadership, providing examples for Christian living, is set against the 'non-ascetic values' of the Chalcedonians. A reoccurring indication of his saints' purity is refusal to be bribed. Harfat refuses the inducement of riches to be made a Chalcedonian bishop and flees Amida and Maro the *ihidaya* refuses money offered to him in an audience by Theodora.<sup>86</sup> And Addai the chorepiscopus declares that he would rather have Christ than possessions when he is driven into exile from his monastery, leaving behind his Chalcedonian abbot.<sup>87</sup> The same concern for the potential for Chalcedonian bribery may be displayed in the *Julian Romance*, where Julian offers prosperity to the cities that go over to him and where Edessa's refusal preserves her faith, and in the *Life of John of Tella* by Elias. In this earlier life, the people who wish to obey the emperor and try to persuade John to go over to Chalcedon are 'people attached to material things'.<sup>88</sup> John maintains his ascetic reputation by refusing gifts from the imperial couple and refusing

<sup>84</sup> See Harvey, *Asceticism*, 69–72.

<sup>85</sup> John emphasises the continuity of monastic protocols and the succession of abbots in *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 592–601). He also provides examples of ideal lay ascetic households in Edessa as exemplars for his readers in *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 576–85). His phrase 'the *politeia* of the believers' occurs in *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 692).

<sup>86</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 159; 2. 633).

<sup>87</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 128).

<sup>88</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 54–5).

to take fees for his ordinations in Persia.<sup>89</sup> Thus, in conditions where the Miaphysites had been placed at a distinct material disadvantage, their literary elites turned refusal to collaborate for cash into an ascetic virtue, simultaneously demeaning the decisions of ‘Suryaye’ who had gone over to Chalcedon.

The contrast between the Miaphysite monks, whose asceticism makes them suitable leaders of the communities whom the hagiographies address, and the reliance of the Chalcedonians upon bribery to secure loyalty feeds into a wider discourse about obedience to the emperor. In the *Julian Romance* we saw how Julian was condemned as a tyrant, both because he had failed to follow the pious legacy of Constantine and because he had only received acclamation at Constantinople after bribing them with riches. To be a just king, one must achieve this pious mandate. Elias’ John of Tella engages in the same debate when he criticises blind obedience to the emperor: he ‘disregards’ the threats of kings to ordain priests in the wilderness.<sup>90</sup> Later, after his imprisonment, he promises not to escape from prison ‘even if the emperor ordered it’ and refuses to recant ‘even if ordered by Severus.’<sup>91</sup> The motif of the text seems to be that a natural law underlies right actions, rather than the commands of any human authority.

Perhaps the most complete illustration of this philosophy is provided in John of Tella’s debate with his Persian captors in Sinjar. His captors ask him: ‘Do you not know that it is an evil thing to act against your master? Why do you act against Caesar who rules your land?’ John replies: ‘I do not rebel against our victorious, peaceful emperor. I obey him as a legal authority in the world and I pray that he will govern his kingdom according to God’s will . . . they persecute me only because I will not follow them in forsaking the faith into which I was baptised’. His Zoroastrian captor replies: ‘I am a Magian and I have two sons. And if the king of kings asked me to change my creed, I would rather see them killed than do so.’<sup>92</sup> Here Elias reiterates his saint’s loyalty to the emperor, repeating his titles and acknowledging his authority, but John’s prayer that he will follow

<sup>89</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 51 and 72).

<sup>90</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 54 and 56).

<sup>91</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 74 and 91).

<sup>92</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 73).

God's will is pointed, for in imposing an innovation in creed in the council of Chalcedon, the emperor has transgressed a natural law of rulership that can even be recognised by a non-Christian barbarian.

The same notion of the Chalcedonian emperors' breaching the conditions of their just rule is found in John of Ephesus. His own image of John of Tella, while less detailed than Elias', goes further in his contrast between earthly authority and divinely approved authority. As well as just placing conditions of piety on authority, John of Ephesus follows the *Julian Romance* in making Chalcedonian impiety a continuation of that of the pagans: Chalcedonians reordain Miaphysites and 'those called Christians threw Christians into the fire, a feat even pagans had been afraid to do'.<sup>93</sup> In addition, similar themes of the *Julian Romance*, withdrawing from claims of imperial authority in favour of the authority of Christ and refusal to sacrifice for a pagan emperor, are also employed in John's *Life of Addai the Chorpiscopus* (Life 8). Here the saint declares that 'Now Christ is driven into exile by you [Chalcedonians], who would not also be banished rather than being infidels and be banished by Him' and denies the emperor's command: 'If there was a king who ordered me to sacrifice like the martyrs, would you have urged me to sacrifice to the idols because he was the king?'<sup>94</sup>

Thus, in different ways, Miaphysite authors asserted the emperor's breach of his divine contract. Elias stresses that Justinian had breached a natural law against religious innovation, and for John and the author of the *Julian Romance* his persecutions meant that Chalcedonians showed themselves not to be true Christians any longer. Taken together, the impression of John's hagiography is that the breach of their obligations to God had left Christ's authority with the ascetics that John describes, and it is to these traditional guardians of orthodoxy that the communities of 'the East' should look to for leadership.

### Self-control and Parrhēsia: Miaphysite Kaiserkritik

We have seen how John's assertions of a Miaphysite ascetic leadership were bound up with claims that this group represented inherited

<sup>93</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 520 and 524–5).

<sup>94</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 127).



orthodox practice, and that imperial religious innovation had removed the emperor's claims to religious obedience. Mesopotamia's monks, whom John describes, represented an orthodox model for the whole empire. And, though these claims by John and other Miaphysite authors were innovative, they used previously established *topoi* of hagiography that had been developed during the Arian controversies. In this section I will argue that the models of ascetic behaviour that John set out in order to champion his own vision of orthodoxy and regional prestige were done as a development of previously established rules, that employed the ascetic behaviour of his heroes as a platform from which to criticise the self-control of the emperor and his advisers and to turn the categorising lens of the fourth-century Roman empire, of heresiology, and ethnography, against a reigning emperor. I will focus on examples of individual confrontation of emperors and holy men, before turning to the wider repercussions of the emperor's loss of self-control within Miaphysite hagiography.

An earlier example of this categorising lens of self-control is provided by Theodoret's hagiography, and its praise of a saint, the Persian Aphrahat, through his defeat of a historical 'heretical' emperor, the 'Arian' Valens. The former is seen as having transcended his original nature through Christianity and the ascetic attraction of grace: 'That the nature of all men is one and that it is simple for those who wish to practise philosophy, whether Greek or barbarian, is easy to learn from many example. But Aphrahat alone is sufficient to show how a man born amongst "lawless Persians", and educated in their customs, exceeds even those born of pious parents.'<sup>95</sup> To Theodoret there is a natural scheme in which barbarians are lawless, but this is transcended in the Christian era and, as this text emphasises especially, through an asceticism that is possible for all and that allows men to realise God's grace. Just as other saints overcome nature in surviving without food, so Aphrahat overcomes the nature inherent in his culture and ethnicity and reveals a latent potential, worshipping God in imitation of his ancestors the Magi and going to Edessa.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> HR 8.1 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 372).

<sup>96</sup> HR 8.1 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 374).

Theodoret goes on to describe Aphrahat's criticism of Valens' persecution of the 'orthodox' on the parade ground at Antioch. His description here uses the Platonic metaphor of the ship of state 'assailed by hurricanes and waves' to describe the empire under Valens' rule. This involves a conflation of the description of Valens' own soul with the state of the empire, following the associations made in Plato's *Republic*: 'Thanks to his lawlessness he could not satiate his impiety but dispersed the pious, eager to scatter the flock like a beast, while Scythians and barbarians ravaged from Thrace to the Propontis.'<sup>97</sup> The characterisation contrasts the lawlessness of Valens' character and soul with that of Aphrahat, following the connection of heresy and 'barbaric' irrationality in the bestial wish to destroy that is engendered by Valens' impiety. It is the same connection that we see in ecclesiastical history. The cited passage also involves the ecclesiastical historians' connection of the fate of the empire with orthodoxy. Barbarian success is seen in generalised, archaic, and historically static terms as the victory of 'Scythians', allowing it to represent a generic, negative other, the criteria against which an emperor is judged. This success has been allowed by heresy, which has increased the sufferings of the orthodox, who are sympathetically compared to the Jews in Babylon.<sup>98</sup>

So the scene involves two views of the barbarian, one redeemed by Christianity and one representing an unchanging nomadic other, both of which undermine the reputation of Valens. The final result is a Christian inversion of classical assumptions in which the quasi-barbarian saint is the avatar of order and the irrational and heretical emperor exemplifies disorder, a contrast that is accentuated when Aphrahat marches onto the parade ground, the centre of the tyrant's military power, armed only with his *parrhēsia*, to defy his heresy. Valens' vice is ultimately confirmed in the nature of his death: 'killed by a barbarian's fire and buried in a grave unfit for a beggar.'<sup>99</sup>

*Parrhēsia*, the ability to speak plainly in public before the powerful, without fear of tyranny, is the crux of this encounter. The saint's ability demonstrates his self-control, just as the emperor's reaction

<sup>97</sup> HR 8.5 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 384).

<sup>98</sup> HR 8.6 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 384).

<sup>99</sup> HR 8.12 (eds. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 1. 398).

demonstrates his lack of it. In this sense, Christian *parrhēsia* retained the associations the word had accrued in Athens in the fifth century BC, as one of the defining features of democratic and self-controlled government against that of unmoderated tyrannies, such as Achaemenid Persia, whose luxuriant government made the Persians themselves irrational and slavish.<sup>100</sup> But *parrhēsia* did not have to be the aggressive confrontation we see in the example of Valens and Aphrahat. *Parrhēsia* could represent the power of the bishop or holy man, in alliance with his local community, to petition the emperor.<sup>101</sup> Since the emperor's information about the workings of the provinces and petitions for changes in the law came from these provincial alliances, his acceptance of *parrhēsia* was an aspect of good government.<sup>102</sup> Thus hagiographies and ecclesiastical historians praise the good relations between saints and emperors as a source of local benefits and an advantage for the emperor, who receives prayers and information, as in the case of Ambrose and Valentinian I, Theogonius of Bethelia and Justin I or Theodore of Sykeon and Phocas.<sup>103</sup>

The praise for properly functioning *parrhēsia* before the emperor is continued even into an era when churchmen, ascetics and emperors were divided by Christology. The Miaphysite historian Zachariah of Mytilene, whose chronicle extends to 491, sees *parrhēsia* as a cause and symptom of good government.<sup>104</sup> And the Palestinian Chalcedonian hagiographer, Cyril of Scythopolis, represented the relationship between saint Sabas and the Miaphysite emperor Anastasius as

<sup>100</sup> E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989), 98.

<sup>101</sup> G. Bartelink, 'PARRHESIA', *Greacitas et Latinitas Christianorum*, supp. 3 (Nijmegen, 1970), 5–57, esp. 12–14 and 35–44 summarises the models of 'positive *parrhesia*', based on Christ's relationship with God, and 'negative *parrhesia*', based on Christ before Pilate.

<sup>102</sup> See C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in late antiquity: the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley, 2005), 267–9; P. Gray, 'Palestine and Justinian's legislation on non-Christian religions', in B. Halpern and D. Hobson (eds.), *Law, Politics and Society in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Sheffield, 1993), 241–70, esp. 241–6; Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 116–17.

<sup>103</sup> Theodoret, *HE* 4. 16 (ed. Parmentier and Hanson, 229–30); *Life of Theogonius of Bethelia*, 21 (tr. Vivian, 160); *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, 133 (ed. Festugière, 105).

<sup>104</sup> Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 5 (ed. Brooks, 210–11) which views Zeno's Henotikon as the emperor's response to the *parrhēsia* of his people.

positive. Though Anastasius is furious with the Chalcedonian patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem, he overrules his *silentarii*, who have refused to let in the ragged Sabas, receives him, gives him money and promises peace among the churches in exchange for Sabas' prayer.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Cyril praises Anastasius as 'a lover of monks who had been led astray by bad men'. While admitting Anastasius' intransigence on matters of Christology, Cyril attributes this chiefly to bad advice and an understandable fear of Nestorianism, and, instead of focusing on this difference, chooses to lay greater stress on Anastasius' tax remissions for Palestine.<sup>106</sup> Thus Cyril's Chalcedonian agenda never causes him to question Anastasius right to rule or to portray him as a heretical tyrant, of the model of Theodoret's Valens.

Importantly, John of Ephesus' portrayal of Justinian moves much closer towards the fifth century's representation of Arian emperors. A case in point is the first pair of lives in John's collection, those of Habib and Z'ura, a master and his disciple (Lives 1 and 2). The disciple Zu'ra opposes Justinian's religious policies with direct and aggressive *parrhēsia*, but John has been preparing the saint's ascetic credentials long before this. By opening his collection with a pair of saints, whose combined lifespans stretch back long before the persecutions under Justin I and Justinian, John can emphasise a continuity of tradition. So, while Z'ura has established his saintliness by the time he meets Justinian, by miraculously starting a spring and paralysing a Hunnic raider, his performances continue a tradition established by Habib, an active exorcist and healer.<sup>107</sup>

The connection between master and disciple serves a purpose in itself, to emphasise the ascetic history of the territory, but it also allows the reader to see the same criteria of justice being applied in Mesopotamia as in the capital: the same rules and the same intolerance of injustice are applied to everyone. Thus Habib curses a magnate who collects debts from his tenants, driving them into penury, and withers the arm of another, who tries to force Habib to join a monastery he has founded.<sup>108</sup> Habib is not an opponent of the social hierarchy per se,

<sup>105</sup> *Life of Sabas*, 51 (ed. Schwartz, 141–3).

<sup>106</sup> *Life of Sabas*, 51–4 (ed. Schwartz, 143–7).

<sup>107</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 12–14 and 18–20).

<sup>108</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 8–9).

since he protects the vineyards of a good landowner from a hailstorm, but he punishes those who abuse their authority by oppressing the poor or trying to constrain the independence of the *qadishe*.<sup>109</sup> It is this inherited role of the holy man as a judge of the just use of authority that Z'ura applies against the emperor.

After Habib's death and the beginning of the persecutions, Z'ura the stylite is brought down from his column by the 'synodites' [Chalcedonians] and decides to 'go to him who has taken the royal authority and make witness (μαρτυρῆσαι) <sup>110</sup> to him before our Lord Jesus concerning the persecution of the church and the distress of holy men in all lands'. The text goes on to compare Justinian and Z'ura with Ahab and Elijah and to describe their meeting as 'a contest against the roaring lion that seeketh whom it may devour' in which the saint rails against 'the barbaric synod'.<sup>111</sup> The emperor responds by becoming 'excited by rage' and accusing Z'ura of being a Syrian deceiver and condemning to death all who anathematise the synod, a threat which is met by self-control and calm on the saint's part.<sup>112</sup> Z'ura then promises the emperor that God will show him a sign within his soul, and, after he almost dies from a sudden disease, the emperor allows Miaphysite gatherings.<sup>113</sup> However, the saint is then opposed by the Pope Agapetus, who is present in the capital. The Pope's attempts to interview Z'ura are thwarted by two miracles, in which his boat is struck by lightning when crossing the Bosphorus and when 'since the fear of God was not in his eyes, he was punished like an Assyrian for his foolishness (οὐλομένη) and God cursed his tongue and it grew down to his chest', rendering him unable to speak.<sup>114</sup> Finally, in a twist by John to explain away Z'ura's detention in Thrace, the saint agrees to leave Constantinople to prevent a riot, as a favour to Theodora.

The account emphasises Z'ura's ragged clothing, and his name itself means 'the small'.<sup>115</sup> Like Theodoret's Aphrahat, his ascetic

<sup>109</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 13).

<sup>110</sup> Also 'to be a martyr'.

<sup>111</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 21–3).

<sup>112</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 24–8).

<sup>113</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 25).

<sup>114</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 29–30).

<sup>115</sup> Similar features are used in the *Life of Mara the Ihidaya* (Life 36) when the saint meets the emperor. *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 631–4).

experience and his linguistic difference in the wilderness allows him to criticise the values and beliefs of material society, and this difference is marked in his clothing, which sets him apart from the finery of the court and grants him *parrhēsia* to step outside the hierarchies of high politics, inverting its normal rules.<sup>116</sup> This display sets Z'ura in the role of the martyr, who 'contends with death heroically', whose barbaric appearance has become an indication of his asceticism and of the self-control that it develops. And this is then set against the raging, animal-like emperor, who is compared to the Devil, 'the roaring lion'.

The conclusion of the tale makes clear the victory of the ascetic over the corrupt cleric, since in being deprived of speech by his disease, the patriarch has lost one of the features of his humanity. He has, in a sense, been deprived of his *logos* and has become like an animal or an incomprehensible barbarian, such as the Huns who appear in other lives in this collection.<sup>117</sup> The fact that it is his tongue that is cursed is an especially significant symbol in the discourse of the Christological controversies. In the Palestinian Miaphysite John Rufus' *Pleriphories* in the late fifth century, the tongue of Nestorius is cursed by God after his expulsion.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, when the general Vitalian arrived in Constantinople after the death of Anastasius he threatened to cut out the tongue of Severus, and the loss of his tongue is the opening feature of the hostile Syriac *Life of Maximus the Confessor*, a seventh-century Monothelete text recording the death of the Chalcedonian 'martyr'.<sup>119</sup> Thus the choice of miracle at the end of the life adopts an extreme symbol of heresiology, that, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries had been restricted to those who had sought to polemicise the debate, either because their religious persuasion was faced by local extinction, as in the case of Rufus, or to whip up support for a political coup, in the case of Vitalian.

Thus the Miaphysites gained the ascetic high ground in the debate. Z'ura's barbaric clothing emphasises his closeness to God and his

<sup>116</sup> On Z'ura's lack of Greek see *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 663) for his interpreter Tribunus (Life 44).

<sup>117</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 77–81 and 245).

<sup>118</sup> John Rufus, *Pleriphories*, 1 (ed. Nau, 12).

<sup>119</sup> Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 8. 1 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 191); Syriac *Life of Maximus the Confessor*, 1 (ed. Brock, 302).

ability to criticise emperor and patriarch, an ability that flows from the mastery of self-control that it grants him. Justinian and his patriarch are then shown to be false, in their doctrine and their persecutions, by a different set of barbaric characteristics, ones that have not lost their connection to actual barbarians, such as rage and an inability to communicate, a punishment fitting for the Assyrians. John reserves the beneficent model of *parrhēsia*, in which the saint requests a favour from his ruler, for the relationship between Christ and the saint. Z'ura's self-control and Justinian's punishment are the results of this higher relationship, which also emphasises Christ's position as the true ruler of the world, above the false rule of the emperor. By using a confrontational model for the saint's *parrhēsia*, John portrays Justinian and Agapetus as barbarians and heretics in the model of Theodoret's Valens.

Interestingly, in another *parrhēsia* scene, where Maro confronts Theodora and Justinian (Life 36), we may see the imperial couple trying to employ the positive model of *parrhēsia* that we saw in the *Life of Sabas*. In giving gold they hope to act as his patrons, and play out the traditional roles of orthodox rulers before an ascetic visitor, but Maro responds by hurling this (incredibly) huge weight of gold across the room and leaving the palace.<sup>120</sup> Unlike the *Life of Z'ura*, John leaves us glimpses of Justinian's attempts to generate positive prestige from Maro's visit, by trying to act as a patron and attending his funeral along with his senators.<sup>121</sup> Potentially this public scene was well known to contemporaries, and could not be rewritten in the way that private audiences with the emperor might be, which would have left relics of Justinian's public tolerance of the Miaphysites in the shared history of the events that John was forced to engage with.

### An Empire in Disarray

An important feature of Theodoret's description of Valens had been that the emperor's barbaric heresy was accompanied by a lack of

<sup>120</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 633).

<sup>121</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 641). John also reports Justinian receiving the blessing of Miaphysite patriarchs in *Lives* 2. 680.

order in his realm, which faced natural disasters and barbarian invasions. We can detect the same connection between the state of the empire and the qualities of the ruler in John. The descriptions of wars, plagues, and natural disasters and portents accompanying accounts of Chalcedonian persecution that fill his hagiography, and the already composed second volume of ecclesiastical history, conform to an earlier model of the disruption of the empire flowing from a lack of piety and self-control on the part of its ruler and accompanying his persecutions.<sup>122</sup> This image of the collapse of natural order is summarised in the deathbed lament of the ascetic Bassian (Life 41): ‘Who would not weep over the destruction of the race of men! All men run away from the fear of God [from orthodox religion] . . . we behave like deaf animals, without law or fear of judgement.’<sup>123</sup>

Bassian’s lament is similar in tone to Eusebius’ description of fallen man in his ecclesiastical history, as being a barbarian incapable of activating his ‘natural reason’. In Eusebius’ schema, a moral reformation is conducted through the divinely sent messenger figures of Moses, Christ, and Constantine. Ultimately, Constantine provides the positive influence on mankind that allows them to use their pre-existent reason, a theme pursued in the connection between the state of the empire and imperial piety in Socrates or Sozomen.<sup>124</sup> But, crucially, John of Ephesus presents humanity without *logos* in contemporary society—there is no external positive influence from an emperor. The same theme is echoed by the monk Zacharias (Life 19), when he tells John that ‘Christianity has vanished from our land’: Miaphysite orthodoxy is the only true Christianity, and without it, mankind has been left blind.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, by noting that ‘the kingdom of God has suffered persecution since John the Baptist’ this

<sup>122</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE 2* (ed. Chabot, 20) for the comet at the start of Justin I’s reign and the flooding of Edessa and the fire of Antioch that accompanied the death of the Chalcedonian patriarch; 80–108 for the great plague; 127 for the Samaritan revolt; 134–6 for natural disasters across the empire. John of Ephesus, *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 261) for the effects of plague on monks; *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 20 and 115) for real and imagined Hunnic invaders.

<sup>123</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 651).

<sup>124</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 267).



*Life's* emphasis on persecution as the Christian norm entirely dissolves the positive role the ecclesiastical historians had preserved for the emperors, removing the Eusebian separation of a time of persecution and a time of post-Constantinian prosperity.<sup>126</sup>

Similar themes, connecting imperial heterodoxy with the barbarity of his subjects, are pursued in Elias' *Life of John of Tella*. Here Chalcedonians are described '[falling] on Christ's flock like wild animals'.<sup>127</sup> Rufinus, John's interrogator at Reshaina, demonstrates his lack of self-control by behaving 'like a demoniac', whereas John himself functions as an exorcist of real demoniacs.<sup>128</sup> And the activities of the heretic-hunter Comitas, who extorts money from Miaphysites on the Persian border, or of the evil monk Barrabas, 'who spoke of immoral deeds and dancers' all testify to the collapse of public morals and order with the Chalcedonian controversies.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, these Romans living in a heretical empire compare badly to John's Persian captors, who treat him reasonably and acknowledge the justice of his position.<sup>130</sup>

Thus, in the discourse on rulership within hagiography and ecclesiastical history, the piety and self-control of the ruler had specific consequences for the order of the state. For John of Ephesus, the barbaric heresy of Justinian went hand in hand with the disruption of the empire. I will argue in this section that the absence of real authority in the emperor left a space for the ascetic leaders of the Miaphysite *politeia* to fulfil his role, at least on a local level within Mesopotamia. On three criteria of imperial self-presentation: as law-giver, as a punisher of the Jews, and as improver of conquered lands, certain Miaphysite hagiographers denied the importance of the emperor's policies and the pious mandate these policies claimed.

<sup>126</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 269).

<sup>127</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 57).

<sup>128</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 85 and 93).

<sup>129</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 86 and 88).

<sup>130</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella* (ed. Brooks, 70–4). Still, John of Ephesus' hagiography goes much further than Elias or the *Julian Romance* had in its denial of the Eusebian role for the emperor. We should not be too eager to press all Miaphysite political thought into a single model, but remember that Miaphysites, writing outside a church with strict internal controls, would have developed different solutions to the problems of authority presented by the Chalcedonian controversies.

The *Lives of Severus* were written by Zachariah Rhetor and John de Beth Aphthonia in c.538. They provide a model for the rejection of urban culture within hagiography. John records Severus' background as the child of pagan notables from Psidia before eventually coming to Beirut to study law and 'belles-lettres', a background he rejects at his conversion. This is prefigured in John's comment on his family and origin: 'it is by themselves that we know men, not by their country and family'.<sup>131</sup> Beirut is portrayed as being full of magicians and pagans, several of whom are students of law and who include an Ethiopian and his master, an Egyptian necromancer.<sup>132</sup> Beirut was the leading law school in the empire, where teaching was still conducted in Latin even in the sixth century and a striking feature of the *Lives* is the pagan and magical associations given to the legal profession.<sup>133</sup> Zachariah's *Life* explicitly contrasts law with 'the divine wisdom' and in John's *Life* Severus, as a young law student, is advised to 'leave the forum (ܘܡܘܨ) and high society (ܚܘܚܘܒܘܬܐ) and attach yourself wings like an eagle or a dove: what do you share with Caesar or his affairs . . . remove yourself from this world, from Sodom and the fire of hell'.<sup>134</sup>

The *Lives* portray Beirut, the law it represents and the emperor's government as tarred with the same brush of magic and paganism. These connections are expanded by the reworking of a hagiographical topos, the debate between the saint and the pagan philosophers in the *Life of Antony*. Here the philosopher is replaced by a 'grammatikos' (here the Syriac transcribes the Greek directly) who is also 'one of the best of the heresiarchs who composed a long apology for the council of Chalcedon'.<sup>135</sup> He is, of course, defeated in debate by Severus. So the lives contain an attack on important pillars of the Justinianic reform programme: law, urban educated culture, and the

<sup>131</sup> John de Beth Aphthonia, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 211).

<sup>132</sup> Zachariah rhetor, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 56–73).

<sup>133</sup> On Beirut, see P. Collinet, *L'école de droit à Beiruit* (Paris, 1925).

<sup>134</sup> Zachariah rhetor, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 54); John bar Aphthonia, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 217).

<sup>135</sup> John de Beth Aphthonia, *Life of Severus* (ed. Kugener, 248) and compare Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 72 (ed. Bartelink, 320). Also see John of Ephesus, *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 135) for a similar association of education with arrogance in a cleric.

reconciliation of differing Christologies.<sup>136</sup> They were written at a time when the emperor portrayed himself as the living source of a divine law, continuing the claims of imperial panegyric that blurred the representations of charismatic religious leaders and officials in state ceremonies.<sup>137</sup> There is a contrast here with the *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*, which we examined in Chapter 4, that gives the Roman law as one of the three forces that should have restrained the Goth from his crime of abduction, equal to the judgement of God and the Goth's covenant with the martyrs.<sup>138</sup> Where the fifth-century Edessene *Life* had accepted the benefits of imperial law alongside its concern for the Syriac language and Edessene martyrs, the ascetic reputation of Severus served as a vehicle for the criticism of all urban culture and of the emperor's involvement with it.

John of Ephesus' hagiography provides a variant on the same theme with a description of a rural saint who opposes Jews and Chalcedonians as the clients of corrupt urban churches. The *Lives of Simeon and Sergius* (Life 5) are set almost entirely within the village of Kalesh near Amida. In some senses they epitomise John's vision of an ascetic's social role in providing an exemplar for the whole community and defeating the forces that threaten it. Simeon and Sergius both combine a wish for personal asceticism with a desire for public ministry: their charismatic power is always deployed for the benefit of their community, providing hospitality, which they stress as the defining feature of Christianity, teaching boys to read, and tending a garden.<sup>139</sup> Before going into solitary retreat like his master, Sergius promises to purge the village of Jews, saying that 'those crucifiers of the Son of God should not be allowed to live at all' and upbraiding Christians who trade with them. He goes on to burn down their synagogue and criticises those members of the church of Amida who had collected tithes for their building. The Jews then complain to the

<sup>136</sup> John of Ephesus also emphasises Severus' role as an opponent of urban decadence: he expels the pastry-makers from the churches and destroys the baths on his arrival in Antioch, a judgement on their sinfulness that is confirmed by God, when he destroys baths and palaces in an earthquake. See John of Ephesus, *HE 2* (ed. Chabot, 13 and 126).

<sup>137</sup> Flavius Cresconius Corippus, 3. 244 (ed. Cameron, 68).

<sup>138</sup> *Life of Euphemia and the Goth*, 44 (ed. Burkitt, 73).

<sup>139</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 85–9).

authorities in Amida and destroy the huts of Sergius and his disciples.<sup>140</sup>

After Sergius had chased away the Jews of Kalesh he followed his master in becoming a recluse but, after Simeon's death, he was called out again by the presence of the Chalcedonians. Sergius condemns them for eating meat and drinking wine before communion and for using barbarian troops against the faithful and goes to Amida to confront the bishop. Sergius interrupts a service that the bishop is conducting, at which Miaphysites are present, and, ignoring all constraints of ceremony, strikes the preacher in the middle of his sermon and cursing Chalcedon. After this he is removed from the congregation, captured and sent to a Chalcedonian Armenian monastery until he escapes to found his own monastery, with the co-operation of local people, before his death.<sup>141</sup>

The monks' ascetic example and their education is part of what allows the village to reproduce its Christian identity. This role is part of John's wider model of an orthodox society led by its ascetics. But their guidance of the community also extends to enforcing its proper boundaries, against the Jews of the village, whose presence is tolerated because of the wealth they bring as traders and as tithes-givers to the church. As we saw above, the rejection of unorthodox activities that are connected to money making is an important theme of the collection, and Sergius' rejection of the Jews is connected to his wider rejection of material wealth: unlike the clergy of Amida, he is able to practise his religion in an orthodox manner because he is not bound by these ties. Moreover, despite Justinian's attempts to discriminate against the Jews in law, John shows such efforts to have been ineffectual: it is the saints who have to stand up to Jews and barbarians since the emperor has failed.<sup>142</sup>

The same analysis can be applied to his attack upon the Chalcedonian bishop of Amida: in providing an extreme example he hopes to prevent Miaphysites from mixing with Chalcedonians. This section perpetuates the mistrust of the church of Amida, which would

<sup>140</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 90–2).

<sup>141</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 96–106).

<sup>142</sup> For Justinian's anti-Jewish legislation see Chapter 4. See *Lives* (ed. Brooks, I. 20, 82, and 115) for saints protecting the faithful against barbarians.

have been more vulnerable to Chalcedonian coercion and bribery, and draws a parallel between the protection of the Jews by the church of Amida for reasons of wealth and the church's support for Chalcedon. Sergius' ascetic resistance to such lures is highlighted by the absence of ascetic self-control among the Chalcedonians, who break the communion fast and rely on irrational barbarians to do their will, whereas the saint is supported by the crowd.<sup>143</sup> By emphasising the natural orthodoxy of the crowd as supporters of the saint, John contrasts the 'Amidenes' with the Chalcedonian clergy, who, unlike Sergius, have abandoned the strictures of their religion and become like the Jews. Following a long theme of *Kaiserkritik* within Syriac, the emperor's leniency towards the Jews was cause for criticism, and, as we saw in the *Julian Romance*, this grew easily into a heresiological image that made the emperor and his Chalcedonian creed allies of the Jews, a disruptive force that must be dealt with before the orthodox monks can return to seclusion in their communities.

Yet in claiming the ascetic high ground for rural monks such as Sergius against their local bishops, and in trying to present them as the natural leaders of the Amidenes, John was playing a dangerous game. John asserted communal boundaries that used 'traditional' features of Mesopotamian asceticism as part of a claim for true authority that was directed against the emperor and the Chalcedonian church. John's monks claimed the inheritance of the church of the martyrs through a suspicion of urban culture and indigenous ascetic traditions that had drawn the concern of fifth-century bishops such as Rabbula and Theodoret. As I stressed above, the canons of the former have a consistent wish to ban many of these practices and to place the others under closer episcopal control. In turning the clock back and claiming the authority of the unchanged traditions of village ascetics, John left himself open to charges of Messalianism. We can see this tension clearly articulated in Elias' *Life of John of Tella*, a generation before, when Christophorus, an Amidene chor-episcopus, accuses John of deceiving (ܐܘܪܘܚܐ) <sup>144</sup> the world 'with your

<sup>143</sup> John the Nazirite also criticised Chalcedonian greed as a lack of self-control. *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 37).

<sup>144</sup> Also 'to cause to wander', which may carry the association of the wandering Messalians.

hair tunic, your black robes and your long beard'. John replies 'By what you say, whoever wears a hair tunic, as you do yourself, and is dressed like the saints of old is a deceiver'.<sup>145</sup> Both sides of the Christological controversies valued ascetic clergy, but while Miaphysite hagiographers, whose saints were persecuted and driven out of their cities, might claim that they were better successors to 'the saints of old', the ascetic practices might also be attacked as ultra-ascetic, and their saints as Messalian deceivers of the generosity of poor communities.

John's emphasis on the saints' willingness to engage in manual labour and to cultivate the land is a reaction to these potential accusations. His ascetics build gardens and vineyards and make baskets, setting an example to the young to avoid idleness.<sup>146</sup> In two instances, the foundation of settlements of John's ascetics is a direct reaction to suspicions that they are scrounging from the people by engaging in constant wandering: as much as these *ihidaye* might have been respected, their behaviour also generated concern at the intentions of men operating outside a tight ecclesiastical structure that John had to allay.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, in connecting his ascetics with the settlement and cultivation of the land, rather than just aimless wandering, John usurped part of the portfolio of a Christian emperor. The interest of the ecclesiastical historians in the conversion and improvement of foreign peoples had been continued in the action and self-presentation of Justinian's empire. Procopius' accounts of the conversion of the 'barbaric' Caucasian Tzani portray the benefits of civilisation resulting from religious reform and legislation planned by the emperor himself: 'The Tzani were not skilled in cultivation, but lived from plunder. Thus they lived in independence until they were defeated by the Romans and yielded, preferring toilless servitude to dangerous liberty. And they immediately became Christians, giving up brigandage and marching with the Romans'.<sup>148</sup>

By contrast, in John's hagiography, a world where men within as well as outside the empire behave 'like men without God, like deaf

<sup>145</sup> Elias, *Life of John of Tella*, (ed. Brooks, 77).

<sup>146</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 87–9; 2. 538; 2. 642; 2. 671; 1. 120; 1. 299–300).

<sup>147</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 120; 1. 299–300).

<sup>148</sup> Procopius, *Buildings*, 3. 6. 6–8 (ed. Haury, 3b. 96).

animals without the law, without fear of the dread judgement to come', the cure for this barbarous state comes, not from the emperor's law, but from Christian fellowship provided by his saints.<sup>149</sup> So even if John rejects part of the antique urban inheritance, he is no Messalian. This is articulated in the *Life of Simeon the Mountaineer*, where the saint encounters an isolated community in the Tur Abdin who have forgotten much of their Christianity and are cut off from human contact.<sup>150</sup> The saint expresses concern that they cannot take communion or hear the Scriptures on the mountain and questions their knowledge of theology, whereupon they laugh and ask him 'What is oblation?'<sup>151</sup> After further questioning, they become upset and admit that they 'live on the mountains like animals' and that some of their number have never been to church or been baptised. Symeon goes on to harangue the villagers:

you have said that you live like animals. But animals are better than you: they are as God made them, without perverting or denying or blaspheming against his creation and do not come to judgement. But God made you in his image and gave you his body and blood. You have deprived yourselves of eternal life and have become very wild, surpassing even the animals . . . Do you hold you lives without thought for salvation? When God formed us in his image why do [you] live animal lives outside the rank (رُكُوب) of men? Know that you are men . . . and that God's justice is at hand and that you are called to stand at the tribunal (مِيزَان). Why do you make yourself naked like animals on the mountains?<sup>152</sup>

Here we can detect two interconnected themes in the definition of humanity that we have already encountered. The first is Eusebius' emphasis on Christ as the force that lifts mankind out of his fallen, barbaric state: Symeon sees exposure to communion and the Scriptures as critical to lives suited to men rather than animals, which is phrased in terms of men achieving their inherent potential to be saved that is prefigured in their possession of God's image and in Christ's ordination of communion for mankind. This draws on a second theme that goes back to the Aristotlean notion of the city and

<sup>149</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 2. 652).

<sup>150</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 230–2).

<sup>151</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 233).

<sup>152</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 235–8).

political life allowing men to achieve *eudaimonia*, where the purpose of political thought and institutions is to realise man's potential leisure and happiness. It is this formulation that Theodoret of Cyrrihus pursues in *On Divine Providence* where he states that men must live in an ordered state in order to realise their potential. Symeon seems to be following a similar logic when he states that it is only possible to live animal lives outside a properly ordered Christian community. Christian fellowship, and the teaching and sacraments that accompany it, is therefore made the source of salvation and the realisation of humanity's *telos* and of God's purpose in making man in his image: 'Deprived of Christian fellowship (سلكهم) they were set apart (فأبعدهم) like Jews or pagans'.<sup>153</sup>

So Symeon places life in a Christian community at the core of being a Christian since it allows men to realise their potential. Importantly, his ideal Christian community has ascetics, the *bnay qyama*, one of the traditional institutions of Mesopotamian asceticism, at its core, and is characterised as a place where men can live at peace, where before 'none recognised the blood of a man, whether a friend or a stranger, as that of a locust'. The ideal community is a place where the correct categories are being applied: to be Christian and fully human, one must not treat others as if they were animals. John uses the same definition of humanity to condemn the persecutions of Abraham bar Kayli, who treated the Miaphysites as if they were heretics and therefore showed himself to be beyond the pale. So here, Symeon's village shows the same definition being used in the creation of a community.

Thus there is a connection between settlement and conversion. Symeon employs the language of cultivation in his message to the village, counterpoising his corralling of the people from their mountains into the village and the cultivation of their souls: "your souls are barren and wild from neglect, like soil where thorns and briars have grown, so that a man who wishes to till it must pluck them up before planting seed. Fast and pray before breaking bread on Sunday" ... then he gathered them from their mountains to his

<sup>153</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 241).



house, converting them afresh from paganism and gathered them in like beasts of the field'.<sup>154</sup>

## Conclusions

John's *Lives* illustrate the development of the Edessene myths such as the *Doctrina Addai* and the *Julian Romance*. Their emphasis on the contractual nature of imperial authority, their antipathy towards the Jews and their sense of a distinctive territory of 'Mesopotamia', with its own ascetic customs and history of orthodoxy provided the basis for creation of a boundary with the Chalcedonians in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. In a religious environment where the Chalcedonians had all the advantages of imperial support, the hagiographer could develop the identity of a culturally independent region around Amida and Edessa into a more radical political thought that portrayed the emperor as a heretic and displaced his role as the guardian of 'orthodox' Christians onto Miaphysite holy men.

We can derive some indication of the success of John and his contemporaries in proclaiming a Miaphysite Mesopotamia from changes in language and script that occurred further south at the end of the sixth century. Alain Desreumaux has noted the emergence of Christian Palestinian Aramaic in eastern Palestine and the Transjordan in the sixth to eighth centuries. This Aramaic dialect, which is very close to Syriac, is written in a distinctive script and appears in church inscriptions and small numbers of manuscripts from the Chalcedonian monastery of St Catherine's at Sinai. Desreumaux suggests that it represents the deliberate elevation of one of the local dialects of Palestine into a prestigious written language for Chalcedonian Aramaic speakers in the patriarchate of Jerusalem that might rival Syriac.<sup>155</sup> Given the importance of script as a marker for different communities of Aramaic-speakers, it is possible that Christian Palestinian Aramaic represents the Chalcedonians' reaction to the success of Miaphysite polemicists in associating Syriac with Miaphysitism.

<sup>154</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, I. 240 and 242).

<sup>155</sup> A. Desreumaux, 'La naissance d'une nouvelle écriture araméenne à l'époque byzantine', *Semitica* 37 (1987), 95–107.

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## A Miaphysite Commonwealth

Dimitri Obolensky's *Byzantine Commonwealth* proposed a model for the Christian Roman empire in which it used religion to control an informal empire stretching across the Danube and into Russia and the Steppe world. For Obolensky it was Byzantine influence that stifled the development of nationalism in eastern Europe: for neighbouring polities to use Byzantine models for church and state was equated with membership of an informal empire.<sup>1</sup> He essentially accepts a Byzantine view of the empire, in which cultural borrowing demonstrated cultural and political inferiority.

Garth Fowden has adopted and expanded Obolensky's idea of a commonwealth for the Later Roman empire.<sup>2</sup> He shifts Obolensky's geographical focus to the border between Rome and Persia. In this sphere, he suggests that Rome's Christian informal empire, in Armenia, the Arab tribes, and Axum, acquired a life of its own and was used by local rulers to strengthen regional identities.<sup>3</sup> The attractiveness of Fowden's model is that it allows for the leaders of other polities to expropriate Roman models for church and state to subordinate and overawe their neighbours, to increase their ability to make demands from their Roman allies, and to propagate their culture using Christianity.

However, both Fowden and Obolensky have focused on states. One of the themes of the previous chapter was that Roman persecution

<sup>1</sup> D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (New York, 1971, repr. London, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 59–63 discusses missions in the Caucasus and to the Avars.

<sup>3</sup> G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), esp. 102, 114–16 and 126.

had pushed Miaphysite missionaries out of the empire and into its neighbours. Moreover, as we have seen in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, a tendency of the Miaphysite movement was to displace the authority of a persecuting Roman emperor onto local Mesopotamian holy men or set conditions upon his rule. Developing Fowden's analysis, I will argue that the Miaphysite church was a political actor in its own right and that, while Roman emperors and barbarian kings produced their own versions of events and their own intentions in sponsoring missionaries, certain Miaphysites, writing in Syriac, treated the Christian penumbra of the Roman empire as a distinct cultural entity, united by its distinctive Christian confession and empowered through the invention of new historical narratives: a Miaphysite commonwealth.

## PART I

### The Miaphysite Missions

Certain Roman emperors treated the Miaphysites as part of the orthodox church for the purposes of their missionary work, from the missions into Asia and Nubia, to Theodora's sponsorship of bishops for the Arab tribes. And the activities of Miaphysites in areas of Roman imperial interest, even if undertaken independently, could be presented as a contribution to Roman prestige and her external alliances, as we see in the Chalcedonian presentation of the martyrdoms at Najran in the Yemen. In all these cases, Obolensky's analysis might appear justified.

Yet the Miaphysite movement also encapsulated an increasingly radical political thought, whose conditional view of the pious rule of the Roman emperors would allow their role to be fulfilled by non-Romans. The combination of external missions and these political ideas allowed Miaphysite writers to praise non-Roman kings as adjudicators and protectors, on the model of the emperor. Miaphysite political thought within the empire contributed to the evolution of Christian political narratives and claims to Christian leadership outside the empire. Thus, as we will see, while some political actors,

such as the emperors and their advisers, did view or portray Miaphysite missions and Miaphysite polities as part of a Roman Christian commonwealth, other models for such a commonwealth existed that gave authority to Miaphysite bishops, or to the rulers of Axum or the Ghassanids, alongside the Roman emperor.

Where Fowden focused on the agency of non-Roman polities in appropriating and using the tools of Roman religion and prestige, I wish to stress the independent agency of Miaphysite missionaries and leaders, who stood between Rome and these other polities, who continued to look to the emperor for assistance and, who, because the imperial stance towards the Miaphysites oscillated, also turned to non-Roman rulers.

The complexity of the Miaphysites' position is illustrated by John of Ephesus' *Ecclesiastical History*. For, while John's *Lives* do stress the conditional nature of imperial authority and the emperor's loss of his ascetic mandate, his ecclesiastical history is often much more positive about the empire. It praises Justinian for attacking pagans, Manichees, and Samaritans and building churches in Asia Minor<sup>4</sup> and praises Tiberius for refusing to persecute the orthodox [Miaphysites].<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, John evades the issue of Tiberius' Chalcedonianism: the 'synodites' are those clerics who petition Tiberius to be allowed to persecute the Miaphysites, and the emperor and the population of Constantinople are identified as Christian, rather than Chalcedonian or Miaphysite.

So while he is prepared to criticise a persecuting emperor such as Justin II in the mould of a barbarian or heretic,<sup>6</sup> John continues to praise 'good emperors': there was a continuing expectation among certain Miaphysites that the Roman empire would cooperate. After all, Christianity was, by the sixth century at least, a religion of the empire, which expected imperial intervention to provide churches and priests; to destroy Jews and heretics; and to adjudicate between members of the orthodox who disagreed. Moreover, these expectations were sometimes fulfilled, as in Justinian's sponsorship of Miaphysite mission in Anatolia and Nubia and Tiberius' sponsorship

<sup>4</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 76–8 and 127–8).

<sup>5</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 22, 27–9, 32 (ed. Brooks, 136–7).

<sup>6</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 1–2 (ed. Brooks, 121–3).

of al-Mundhir's attempts to reconcile the schism between the Paulites and the Jacobites.<sup>7</sup> Thus when John criticises Justinian for his failure to ordain priests and prevent heresy in Miaphysite Ethiopia and Himyar, it shows that Miaphysites still expected the emperor's support in some matters.<sup>8</sup>

However, while the relationship between emperors and their Miaphysite subjects fluctuated, the Miaphysite movement underwent two important structural changes in the course of the sixth century. The first was a missionary expansion beyond the borders of the Roman empire, into Syriac-speaking communities in the Sasanian empire, among the Arab federates of the Roman and Persian empires and into the kingdoms of Nubia, Axum, and Himyar.<sup>9</sup> This was, in part, a consequence of persecution. But it also seems connected to the way that authority was acquired within the church. In an environment where patronage as a state church had been dismantled, individuals might gain prestige as missionaries to areas beyond the Roman world, following in the footsteps of such legendary Mesopotamian missionaries as Addai 'in the house of Medians, Persians and Parthians' and Thomas 'in Cush'.<sup>10</sup> The importance of individuals such as Julian of Alexandria and Jacob Baradeus in the disputed Antiochene patriarchal elections of the 570s might be connected to their success as missionaries in Nubia and amongst the Arabs.<sup>11</sup> Thus the missions were associated with the second structural change within Miaphysitism, that is the disintegration of church authority. The combination of the fragmentation of internal authority, the expansion of Miaphysitism beyond the empire and the oscillating attitude of the emperors made it much more attractive to seek non-Roman patronage during times of schism, as we see in appeals to

<sup>7</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2. 77–8 and 3. 4. 39 (ed. Brooks, 218–21). See also the narrative provided in Chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 112).

<sup>9</sup> J. Fiey, *Jalons pour un histoire de l'église en Iraq* (Louvain, 1970), 127; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 296–315.

<sup>10</sup> John of Tella's *Statement of Faith*, cited by V.-L. Menze, *The Making of a Church: The Syrian Orthodox in the Shadow of the Papacy and Byzantium* (Princeton Phd thesis, 2004), 94. Thomas' mission to India is located here in Ethiopia rather than the subcontinent, perhaps reflecting the contemporary Miaphysite presence.

<sup>11</sup> These controversies take up John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4 (ed. Brooks, 183–253).

Ghassanid rulers to intervene against the Tritheites Conon and Eugenius in the 550s and to adjudicate between Paul and Jacob in the 580s.<sup>12</sup>

We can see John's *Ecclesiastical History* as an attempt to preserve Miaphysitism as a single movement, in spite of its internal schisms and loss of authority. In part this goal was achieved by appealing to the history of Christianity within the Roman empire. The idea of the empire exerted an ideological influence that caused John, as well as his Miaphysite predecessor Zachariah of Mytilene, to give the empire's relationship with different Christian groups centre stage. Indeed, both historians recall (or imagine) periods of Miaphysite orthodoxy, under Zeno and Anastasius.<sup>13</sup> But the reality of periodic imperial persecution and successful external missions forced John to reflect upon the whole history of the Miaphysite church in the sixth century, including its missions beyond the frontier, because foreign missions established the prestige of figures such as Simeon beth Arsham, Julian of Alexandria and Jacob Baradeus and 'barbarian' Miaphysite rulers, the Negus Caleb and the Ghassanid phylarch al-Mundhir. By including these figures, John could present a united Miaphysite movement when it faced the threat of internal disintegration.

In some senses, this displacement of Christian authority onto barbarian groups has a pedigree that stretches back into the fourth and fifth centuries. We have seen how Theodoret made Greek only one language among many and praised his Syriac-speaking ascetics. But, for Theodoret, Christianity was a successor to Roman law as an improving force upon the world that was allied to the Roman empire. His praise for Syrian ascetics was part of a process of subverting their pious exemplars, of re-writing their ascetic histories and removing 'extreme' models of behaviour. His example of a 'barbarian' saint defeating the heretical emperor Valens, himself portrayed according to a barbaric stereotype, is safely projected back into the past.

But, just as John's *Lives* criticised a near contemporary heretical emperor in Justinian, so later ecclesiastical historians went further

<sup>12</sup> See below.

<sup>13</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 4–15); Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 5–7 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 101–87).

than Theodoret in blurring the distinction between Roman and non-Roman. John's predecessor Zachariah described how the Chalcedonian patriarch Juvenal attacked monks with Roman and Samaritan troops and 'turned Jerusalem into a wasteland', casting him as one of the alien invaders of the kingdom of Israel and imputing the barbaric characteristics of the Samaritans onto the patriarch and his servants.<sup>14</sup> Like the panegyrists' attacks on pretenders to the throne who employ barbarian allies, Juvenal is without the support of the people of his diocese: he is forced to employ a people who are known for their violence and their opposition to Christianity. Similarly, John condemns the use of a 'Samaritan' adviser by Justin II<sup>15</sup> and the burning of Christians by Abraham bar Kayli: 'they watched him burn and smoke rise from him as if he were an irrational animal. This was a deed alien to humanity, that used a cruelty found in dumb animals... he [Abraham] was considered a Jew and the people separated themselves from him'.<sup>16</sup>

For John and Zachariah, the Jews and Samaritans represent an extreme category of barbarian. The reputations of these peoples are used to tar the agents of the Roman empire who employ them. By contrast, Christian virtue can be found in the barbarian peoples who live beyond the empire. John juxtaposes the persecution of Miaphysites in Constantinople with that of the Persarmenians. Khusrau and Justin II are equated as persecutors while the Miaphysites and the Armenians are both victims. Though the Armenians acknowledge the temporal power of the shah, they refuse his right to convert them, fight against the shah as a united Christian people and then flee to the Romans. Once there, however, they discover the schism between the different Roman churches and organise their own churches within Constantinople.<sup>17</sup>

Critically, Khusrau's persecution is seen as a repetition of the persecutions of Shapur II, the contemporary of Constantine. Justin's failure to prevent the persecution shows the emperor's loss of any Constantinian mandate to rule, a judgement that is reinforced by

<sup>14</sup> Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 3. 5 (ed. Brooks, 159).

<sup>15</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 2. 29 (ed. Brooks, 55–6).

<sup>16</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 36).

<sup>17</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 2. 20–4 (ed. Brooks, 82–8).

equating him with the shah. But, more importantly, the memory of this fourth century history makes this vignette part of a longer, independent narrative of Christian Armenia, an assertion of a Christian history independent from that of the Roman empire. Moreover, by establishing a connection between the Armenians and other Miaphysites, John asserts what Benedict Anderson has termed 'an imagined community', stressing, in this instance, the leitmotif of persecution in Christian history.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, John's Miaphysite imagined community excludes the contemporary Roman empire, whose rulers are persecutors rather than the persecuted, like the Armenians' leader, the exiled *catholicos* of Dwin.

In the rest of this chapter I will focus upon the role of non-Roman Christian powers in the creation of new ideas of a Miaphysite imagined community and models for Christian kingdoms that challenged the monopoly of the Roman emperors on a pious mandate for rule. I will investigate two spheres of Christian influence beyond the Roman world, culminating in their treatment by John of Ephesus. First I will examine the texts produced in the wake of the martyrdoms of Najran, that concerned the Red Sea powers of Axum and Himyar as well as the Lakhmid Arab city of Hira and the Sasanian empire, before turning to the missions to the Arab federate kingdoms and the attempts of the Ghassanid phylarchs to establish their prestige as Miaphysite kings.

## PART II

### The Martyrs of Najran: Varieties of the Christian Commonwealth

The image of an international Miaphysite community evolved in concert with the expanded interests of the empires of Rome and Persia. Procopius describes how the Romans sought to evade Persian control of the Red Sea silk trade by employing the Christian African kingdom of Axum to control both sides of the entrance to the Red

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1–36.



Sea and by maintaining a client ruler in Himyar [the Yemen].<sup>19</sup> An inscription from Adulis in Ethiopia implies that Axum frequently controlled territory across the straits during times of strength, and in this sense Roman foreign policy merely sought to tap a pre-existent dynamic.<sup>20</sup> In Beaucamp's reconstruction of events, an Axumite governor was expelled from Himyar in 519 by a 'nativist' revolt under one Yusuf, known to Malalas as Dhu Nawhas and as Masruq ('the wretch') to the Syriac sources, who was ostensibly a convert to Judaism.<sup>21</sup> The rebellion of this 'Jewish' Himyarite ruler was also the occasion for a massacre of Christians in the city of Najran. This massacre was reported widely in the Arab world, at the Lakhmid capital of Hira, the Ghassanid camp at Jabiya, in Axum, and in the Roman empire.<sup>22</sup> These reports include the appeals of Najranite Christians to Christian rulers and that of Masruq to the Lakhmids and the Persians and are based upon the statements of different Najranite ambassadors to Romans, Persians, and Arabs assembled in the Lakhmid town of Ramla.<sup>23</sup> This religious propaganda, alongside their trading interests, motivated the Axumite re-conquest of Himyar in 523, the installation of a regent and the foundation of new churches.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, however, it would be the Persians who

<sup>19</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 1. 19–20 (ed. Haury, 1. 100–9). Z. Rubin, 'Byzantium and South Arabia', in D. French and C. Lightfoot (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1989), 383–420, at 383 observes that the control of the Red Sea, and alliances with Nubia and Axum were logical continuations of Anastasius' reconquest of the island of Jotaba, an important entrepôt near Aqaba. Trade was conducted in 'pepper, perfume and silk'. *Acta Arethae*, 2 (ed. Carpentier, 722).

<sup>20</sup> S. Munro-Hay, *Aksum: an African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1991), 79–80.

<sup>21</sup> I. Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran: Important New Sources* (Brussels, 1971), 177; J. Beaucamp, F. Briquel-Chattonet, and C. Robin, 'La persécution des chrétiens de Nagran et la chronologie Himyarite', *Aram* 11–2 (2001), 15–83, at 35. The latter also note that the king's unusual title as 'king of the tribes' shows that he had not been widely recognised.

<sup>22</sup> Shahid, *Martyrs*, 114–24 and the texts discussed below.

<sup>23</sup> Greatrex and Lieu, *Rome and Persia*, 79. This conference had been originally convened to ransom Roman officers taken prisoner by the Lakhmids. See I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, 1995), I, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Beaucamp et al., 'Chronologie Himyarite', 37. The regent Abraha (*PLRE* 3. 4–5) later declared de facto independence from Axumite control and reigned as king of Himyar in the 530s and 40s.

established long-lasting control of Himyar, ruling the region through a descendant of one of Masruq's lieutenants from the 570s.<sup>25</sup>

The appeals of the Christian ambassadors seem to have formed the kernel of traditions surrounding the martyrs of Najran, which was presented in different ways by the Christian powers. In the following section I will examine two traditions that stemmed from original oral reports of the persecutions and use them alongside a modern theory of nationalism to investigate the different ways in which Himyar's Christian identity was presented and Himyar's relationship with the Roman empire and Axum.

The *Book of the Himyarites* is a Syriac hagiographic collection that claims to be based on an eyewitness account by the newly converted father of one of the martyrs. It is anonymous and its many lacunae are partially compensated for by a complete table of contents.<sup>26</sup> Its claim to be based on an eyewitness account, and the dependence of later accounts of the martyrdoms upon the *Book*, suggest that it was composed in the immediate aftermath of the massacre in the 520s. It begins by describing the arrival of Jews and Christians in Himyar and denouncing the evil of the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Next it tells how Masruq besieged the cities of Himyar and 'sent Jewish priests from Tiberias and bin Mauhaba, "a Christian in name" from Hirta d'Nu'man, swearing by Ark and Torah to spare the besieged people of Zafar'.<sup>28</sup> The Axumite garrison of Zafar relents, but is betrayed by Masruq, who kills those who will not convert to Judaism.<sup>29</sup> Next Masruq takes his troops to Najran, 'adding that not one of his chiefs should dare disobey him' and there finds priests from Hira, from the Romans and from the Persians.<sup>30</sup> The Christians of Najran refuse to convert and are massacred in a long central section that takes up most of the narrative, in

<sup>25</sup> Christensen, *L'iran*, 373.

<sup>26</sup> Shahid, *Martyrs*, 133–5 ascribes the text to Simeon beth Arsham and Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites* (Lund, 1924), xlvi to Sergius of Rusafa (based on a reference in the *Book's* Greek derivative, the *Acta Arethae*). However, since there are no grounds for Shahid's attribution beyond the text's Syriac language, Miaphysite bias and Simeon's authorship of other texts on the martyrs, and since we have no information about Sergius, I will treat the work as anonymous.

<sup>27</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 1–3 (ed. Moberg, 3).

<sup>28</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 7 (ed. Moberg, 7).

<sup>29</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 8 (ed. Moberg, 7).

<sup>30</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 13 (ed. Moberg, 13–5).

an account that emphasises the barbarity of the Jews and of Masruq, 'the denier of Christ and shedder of innocent blood', and the solidarity of the Christians, even of their women and children.<sup>31</sup> The final chapters, which are extant, describe the Axumite reconquest, which is compared to the conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua, and the Negus' acceptance of repentant Jews and apostates.<sup>32</sup> The text ends with the hope that 'the blood of the martyrs will be added to the [lacuna] blood of the holy martyr Thomas'.<sup>33</sup>

Like the titles of John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* or Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, the title of this text asserts a geographic unity for the area of Himyar, a territory bound by its shared experience of martyrdom and persecution.<sup>34</sup> It represents the experience of the kingdom of Himyar as a parallel to the conflict between Jews and Christians that has occurred in the Mediterranean: Masruq is allied to Jews from Tiberias, a great centre of late antique rabbinic teaching (the same group led the other Jews into paganism in the *Julian Romance*) and Masruq's troops apprehend priests from Rome, Hira and Persia in Najran. Thus the hagiography is moulded to present Himyar as a microcosm of the conflict of international forces, between the Jews and their allies and of an international [Miaphysite] Christianity.

Like the inhabitants of Edessa in the *Julian Romance*, the Najranites demonstrate their solidarity in persecution and their opposition to the Jews, and the result of the narrative is the completion of the land's Christianisation, through the inspiration of local pagans, such as the author's informant, and the conversion or elimination of Jews. The narrative asserts the existence of a process of persecution and Christianisation that gives a territory prestige and an identity as a Christian land. Moreover, the text's concluding reference to Thomas ties the completion of this paradigm of Christian history in Najran to the Edessene apostle. In making this connection, the author of the *Book*, writing in Syriac, asserted a paradigm of mission, martyrdom and conversion as the defining features of a Christian

<sup>31</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 19–40 (ed. Moberg, 23–44).

<sup>32</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 43–7 (ed. Moberg, 46–54).

<sup>33</sup> *Book of the Himyarites*, 49 (ed. Moberg, 56–60).

<sup>34</sup> See also Shahid, *Martyrs*, 179.

territory, variants of which had been employed in the invented histories of the city of Edessa in the fifth and sixth centuries. Following the Syriac legends of Thomas in 'India', he applied this paradigm to a land outside the Roman empire.

In a development of his ideas of imagined community, Benedict Anderson has suggested the importance of 'simultaneity' in the formation of nationalist movements. He points to the example of revolutionary Latin America in 1815–30, when widespread print culture and literacy allowed far-flung Spanish colonies to observe the social processes that other colonies were going through and seek to repeat their revolutionary processes. For Anderson, revolutionary nationalism did not just assert the imagined community of a given territory as a nation, but also asserted the existence of a historical process that could be followed by different would-be states as they sought national status. Argentina and Gran Colombia could establish a revolutionary paradigm through their actions, which could then be exported to Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador, who could participate in the struggle against Spain and repeat the national success of the earlier republics.<sup>35</sup>

The same model of simultaneity can be applied to the ideas of history in the *Book of the Himyarites*. The genre of hagiographic collection itself suggests a territorial awareness because of its geographical parameters. In addition, the region's Christian identity is established according to rules that have been established previously in other territories. The local events described in the collection are also part of a wider process, the universal struggle of Christian lands against its pagan and Jewish opponents. This idea, of the evolution of multiple Christian lands by a set pattern, has a prelude in the fifth-century Mesopotamian histories we examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Here, the history of apostolic missions, of Christian kingship under Abgar, or of Edessa's lone stand against Julian, all display models by which cities could establish their Christian credentials. And, importantly, these

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, esp. 47–63. J. Chatterjee, 'Whose imagined community?', in G. Balakrishnan, *Mapping the Nation* (London, 1996), 214–25, at 214–17 has challenged this model as it applies to twentieth century Asia. He notes for Bengal that a European political model for nationalism was accepted without compromising the spiritual core of the land's history and Sanskrit traditions. We should bear this in mind in late antiquity as well: the adoption of a Roman political model did not mean that 'the inner domain of 'national' culture' was surrendered.

credentials were established on independent grounds from those of the contemporary Roman empire. Edessa remained part of a Roman world and its histories existed in dialogue with Roman histories, with Abgar representing a precursor to Constantine or Edessa preserving Constantinian government during Julian's reign, but the city also asserted its cultural independence through a discrete Christian historical narrative.

The *Book of the Himyarites* represents an extension of the same process, in which a land outside the empire, in the hands of a Syriac author, acquires such a Christian historical narrative without any reference to the Roman empire. Anderson's Latin American model stressed the existence of a print culture for simultaneity, coupled with the rise of lay vernacular literacy. There is no absolute correlation to this in late antiquity, but the most important similarity might be the evolution of distinctive historical narratives and models of expression in the developing vernaculars of the Christian Orient. Thus it might be possible to see a late antique parallel in the spread of Syriac, and the historical and hagiographical models that it contained, first as a prestigious religious language within the Roman empire and then as a language used and exported by missionaries, such as the (recent) Miaphysite missions to Himyar.<sup>36</sup> Syriac literature included within it models for different kinds of Christian historical narrative, created in the environment of a culturally independent Edessa, that could be applied to foreign lands and transmitted to a wider Syriac-reading public. Thus, in the case of the *Book of the Himyarites*, the experience of persecution identified the region as one Christian territory among many.

### State Actors: Caleb and Justin in Himyar

To pursue the analogies with Anderson's theory, the Negus Caleb plays the role of the Bolivar to Himyar's Bolivia. In the *Book of the*

<sup>36</sup> The number of foreign missionaries present in accounts of the martyrdoms suggests Christianity had only recently come to the region. Philostorgius, *HE* 3. 4 (ed. Bidez, 32–4) reports fourth-century missions to Zafar and to Roman and Persian trading posts in the area, but these may never have penetrated the hinterland.

*Himyarites*, the presence of the Axumites does not diminish Himyar's status as an independent Christian land, but Caleb's role assures his prestige as a Christian ruler, as a 'new Joshua' and converter of the Jews. It is this issue, of the involvement of foreign powers in the invasion of Himyar, which would prompt the greatest variations in the text's transmission.

Shahid has convincingly observed that the Ethiopian epic of the *Kebra Nagast* is closely connected with the events described in the *Book of the Himyarites* and may have been mostly composed in the sixth century.<sup>37</sup> The *Kebra Nagast* is concerned with the descent of the Ethiopian kings from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, traditionally identified with Saba in the Yemen;<sup>38</sup> it is preoccupied with the sins of the Jews and the need of the Romans and Ethiopians to persecute them<sup>39</sup> and is opposed to the 'corruption of the faith' by Nestorius and the Romans.<sup>40</sup> This interest in Rome and in the Christological controversies is much more likely for a sixth century composition than one written at the 'restoration' of the Solomonic dynasty in the fourteenth. Moreover, in a text celebrating the 'glories of kings', Caleb, the liberator of the Himyarites, is the second of the two kings mentioned, the other being Solomon. Thus the interests of the text, to establish Axum's Miaphysite and anti-Jewish credentials and its historic claims to Saba, can be tied to the aftermath of Caleb's invasion of Himyar, when the king was exploiting the event's potential for his self-propaganda and asserting his right to control Himyar, despite the effective independence of his regent.<sup>41</sup>

However, one feature of the *Kebra Nagast* that sees no parallel in the *Book of the Himyarites* is the importance of Justin I. He is presented meeting Caleb at Jerusalem after the destruction of

<sup>37</sup> I. Shahid, 'The Book of the Himyarites: authorship and authenticity', *LM* 76 (1963), 349–67. However, the text was probably further edited later, explaining the stories of the Persian defeat of the Byzantines in *Kebra Nagast*, 113 (tr. Budge, 221–3), probably referring to the first decades of the seventh century.

<sup>38</sup> *Kebra Nagast*, 21 (tr. Budge, 16–7).

<sup>39</sup> *Kebra Nagast*, 108 and 116–17 (tr. Budge, 211–13 and 225–8).

<sup>40</sup> *Kebra Nagast*, 93 (tr. Budge, 163–5).

<sup>41</sup> For this regent see Beaucamp et al., 'Chronologie Himyarite', 78.

the Jews.<sup>42</sup> The presence of Justin reflects the influence of another variation of the *Book of the Himyarites*, the Greek *Acta Arethae*. This text abbreviates the martyrdoms recorded in the central section of the *Book*, but, unlike the *Book*, it is complete and is without lacunae. Given the dependence of its martyr acts upon those in the *Book* and its praise of Justin I, it is probably written in the late 520s, though it could be written later under Justin's nephew Justinian. Its final section differs from that in the *Book* by explaining the international context for the expedition to Himyar. After the conference at Ramla, where Roman agents were trying to negotiate the protection of Christians in the Persian Empire (brushing over the fact that Persian Christians were Miaphysite and 'Nestorian' by this time), the Himyarites appeal to Justin, who promises to send 'Nobades and Blemmyes' from Egypt and Nubia, and who then sends a letter to Timothy of Alexandria, who asks Caleb to intervene on his behalf.<sup>43</sup> Mirroring Constantine's letter to Shapur, Justin follows this by writing to the Persian shah on behalf of the Christians.<sup>44</sup> Then, when the expedition is launched, it is the Roman navy that transports the Axumites to Himyar.<sup>45</sup>

The *Acta Arethae* erases Himyar's Miaphysitism and presents Justin as the defender of a Christian commonwealth, able to call upon a loyal patriarch at Alexandria, mobilise Christian allies, and protect Persian Christians. The text ignores any differences in Christology and treats *all* Christians as his responsibility. This portrayal, probably written in Justin's reign and using the material of the *Book of the Himyarites*, is also a reply to the *Book's* image of Himyar's independence: for the *Acta Arethae*, Justin is the ruler of an undivided Christian commonwealth that gives him claims on the powers of the Red Sea and on the allegiance of Persian Christians. And it is this image that the *Kebra Nagast*, written later in the sixth century, accommodates. It preserves Caleb's prestige from the campaign and asserting his control over Himyar, while acknowledging Justin's importance and presenting Caleb and Justin as co-rulers of the world.

<sup>42</sup> *Kebra Nagast*, 117 (tr. Budge, 226).

<sup>43</sup> *Acta Arethae*, 25–7 (ed. Carpentier, 742–3).

<sup>44</sup> *Acta Arethae*, 27 (ed. Carpentier, 743).

<sup>45</sup> *Acta Arethae*, 29 (ed. Carpentier, 747).

The variations on the *Book of the Himyarites* tradition point to a flaw in the model of simultaneity that I have borrowed from Anderson. Does the experience of a Christian historical paradigm imply that a territory is in some way subject to the Roman empire, which provided the original model of Christian persecution followed by Christian government? Interestingly, this flaw is shared by Anderson's original example. During the Latin American revolutions, Bolivar wrote to San Martin in Argentina, promising that all the states of South America would be united after they had achieved independence from Spain. Bolivar's intention was put into practice in North America: here the Thirteen Colonies provided the inspiration for the revolutions of Texas and California against Mexico, and later incorporated both territories into the United States. During its existence, the Republic of Texas was split by different ideas of its historical destiny: did its pursuit of revolution imply union with the United States or continued independence? In the nineteenth-century arena in which Anderson developed his theory, I suggest that the historical paradigm for the creation of new states produced two possible outcomes: of the simultaneous emergence of multiple different states along parallel lines or of a single federate system.

Like the revolutionary paradigm in the nineteenth-century Americas, there was a tension in Christianisation of non-Roman states. The process of Christianisation could be presented, as the *Acta Arethae* does, as membership of a Roman sphere of influence, the model that Obolensky identified for the Byzantine empire, or, like the *Book of the Himyarites*, a process that could occur outside Roman claims to universal authority.

The different representations of Christian rulers in these three texts, the *Book of the Himyarites*, the *Acta Arethae*, and the *Kebrā Nagast*, illustrate the potential of the martyrdoms of Najran and their aftermath for different forms of political thought and different representations of the hierarchy of Christian rulers. The same events are also reported independently of the shared tradition of these accounts in a second group of texts. This second group is represented by two letters, written before the Axumite intervention, from Hira and Jabiya (the Lakhmid and Ghassanid capitals) in the aftermath of the persecutions and before the negotiations at Ramla (i.e. between 519 and 523). While the traditions that derived from the *Book of*



*Himyarites* focused upon the development of a single Christian territory in Himyar, and its relationship to neighbouring states, the original reports of Miaphysite missionaries place a greater emphasis on the place of the martyrdoms as part of an international Miaphysite movement.

### The Martyrs of Najran: The Earliest Reports

The first of these reports was written by Simeon Beth Arsham, 'bishop of the Persian Christians'. It describes the arrival of Masruq's envoys at Ramla and tells of the persecutions and how al-Mundhir the Lakhmid mocked the Miaphysites present at Ramla: 'Your Christ has been rejected by Romans, Himyarites and Persians, do you not now reject Him?' The phylarch's mockery is countered by an Arab Christian 'magnate': 'It was not in your time that we became Christians, but in the time of our fathers' fathers.'<sup>46</sup> The report emphasises the self-sufficiency of Christianity amongst the Arab clients of Mundhir, as well as identifying only Miaphysitism as Christianity: the Romans represent another group of persecutors rather than a Christian people.

In the accounts of the martyrs of Najran that follows, Simeon employs two features common to many of the Miaphysite texts examined here. The first is the attack on those who abuse worldly authority: the martyr Arethas bar Karib tells Masruq: 'A king who behaves treacherously is no king... [but] I remain a ruler over myself.'<sup>47</sup> As we saw in Elias' *Life of John of Tella* and in the *Julian Romance*, written within ten years of Simeon's letter, Miaphysite authors emphasised the limitations of imperial authority with regard to innovation in religion, and presented this innovation as an abuse of a natural law that divided monarchy from tyranny. The same kind of *Kaiserkritik* may lie behind the martyr's attack on Masruq, with Arethas' attack on Masruq's betrayal of the Axumites at Zafar applying simultaneously to the Roman emperor's betrayal of his Miaphysite subjects.

<sup>46</sup> *Letter of Simeon beth Arsham* (ed. Guidi, 508).

<sup>47</sup> *Letter of Simeon beth Arsham* (ed. Guidi, 509).

The second is to present martyrdoms as a microcosm of the wider conflict between Christianity and Judaism. The letter complains of the involvement of the rabbis of Tiberias 'whose gold covers the truth' and contrasts this with the Christian cities who Simeon hopes to mobilise against the Jews. By writing to the Negus, by way of the patriarch of Alexandria, and to 'the faithful' of Egypt, Antioch, Tarsus, Caesarea, and Edessa he hopes to put pressure on Masruq to stop the persecutions by threatening synagogues across the Mediterranean and in Himyar.<sup>48</sup> Like the *Book of the Himyarites* and the *Julian Romance*, participation in the international struggle against the Jews defines the boundaries of true Christians. But where the *Romance* had seen Edessa as a lone bastion of Christian government and the *Book's* geographical span went no further than Axum, Symeon's vision of Christian lands extends to the Miaphysite portions of the Roman empire. Moreover, Symeon's image of proper hierarchy in his network of Christian lands makes the Negus answer to the patriarch of Alexandria, whereas the *Acta Arethae* places Justin at the head of the chain of command. Essentially, Simeon preserves the idea of a Christian commonwealth beyond the borders of the Roman empire, but removes the Roman emperor from this vision: instead it is a Miaphysite commonwealth based mostly in Egypt and Syria.

This vision is slightly changed and extended in the *Jabiya Letter*, the second of these early reports.<sup>49</sup> Alongside a record of the martyrdoms, the text emphasises that the martyrs are 'barbarian inmates of Christ's household who abandoned gold and possessions'.<sup>50</sup> The account of the martyrdoms does not differ substantially from that in the first letter, but it concludes with a note that the author has sent documents on the faith written by the Negus Caleb to 'the orthodox Persians' and provides an unadorned list of the martyred clergy, comprising 'a Roman, a Najranite, a man of Hira, a Persian and a Cushite'.<sup>51</sup> While both the Negus' letter and the list of clergy are probably factual reports, their inclusion alongside the positive

<sup>48</sup> *Letter of Simeon beth Arsham* (ed. Guidi, 514).

<sup>49</sup> Shahid, *Martyrs*, 133–4, has also attributed this to Symeon, which is possible but un-provable.

<sup>50</sup> *Jabiya Letter*, 62 (ed. Shahid, xxix–xxx).

<sup>51</sup> *Jabiya Letter*, 63–4 (ed. Shahid, xxx–xxxii).

comments on the ‘barbarians of Christ’ informs us about the political vision of the letter’s author. In an environment of persecution and missionary expansion, he emphasises, as John of Ephesus does, the need to forego material wealth, and stresses the importance of barbarian conversion. His praise of ‘barbarian Christianity’ is connected to the author’s position as a facilitator between Miaphysites in Axum and Persia, writing at the Jafnid court, and as a reporter of the international group of Miaphysite priests killed at Najran. So, if Symeon’s letter presented a Miaphysite commonwealth centred on lands in the Roman empire while denying the importance of the emperor, the author of the Jabiya letter displaced the Romans even further from this commonwealth. Thus the missionary church of the 520s, bound together by Syriac-speaking Miaphysite clergy such as Simeon, produced multiple models of a Christian commonwealth. All of these Miaphysite political models gave varying weight to the different territories and to their rulers, but they all share the tendency to displace the Roman emperor from his monopoly on Christian rule and the protection of Christian communities.

### Memories of Martyrdom and Mission in John of Ephesus

The account that Simeon had written before the Axumite reconquest was preserved, in an abbreviated form, by the later Syriac Miaphysite historians, John of Ephesus and the continuator of Zachariah of Mytilene. The texts of an earlier generation of Miaphysites had emphasised the Christian political narratives of different ‘barbarian’ groups, sometimes knit together into a broader Miaphysite commonwealth.<sup>52</sup> When John and Zachariah wrote, Himyar had been drawn into the Persian orbit, but John is remarkable for a vignette of Axumite history that he appends to this account of the martyrdoms. In this account of the conversion of Andug [Caleb] of Cush [Axum], he places the African king in the role of Constantine, converting after his victorious battle against Dimnon [Masruq] of Himyar.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 54–69) and Zachariah, *HE* 4. 3 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 192–203).

<sup>53</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 2 (ed. Chabot, 55–6).

The Negus still requests bishops from Justinian and invades Himyar to protect Roman merchants, so the Roman empire remains the supreme earthly authority in this schema, but it is important that the paradigm of Christian Roman history, and Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge, could be repeated outside the Roman empire. So, while John's history is focused on the Roman world, the inclusion of the Christian narratives produced in the far-flung missions of the 520s changed the tenor of his account. Given that John wrote the second part of his history in the capital and under threat of censorship, it is striking how far John departs from the model of earlier ecclesiastical historians in describing Christianity beyond the borders of the Roman empire.

Eusebius had spoken of the improving force of Christianity in Frumentarius' fourth-century mission to Axum in the same breath as Constantine's conquest of the Blemmyes and Scythians. Justinian's missionary policy followed this political agenda: the conversion of Heruls, Huns, the Tetraxitae Goths and the Caucasian Laz were all tied to either the territorial expansion of the empire or to the provision of federate troops.<sup>54</sup> And Malalas had seen the same forces at work in Najran: in his report, after the king of Axum became a Christian, 'since he was fighting for the Christians', requested priests 'so that he could be taught Christianity' and wished that all India [Axum] should pass under the Romans.<sup>55</sup> But for John, conversion has been much more displaced from Roman authority and he focuses instead upon Caleb's assumption of Christian kingship as the critical turning point. For John, the Milvian Bridge has become a repeatable process and Axum has encroached upon the Roman emperor's monopoly of Christian kingship. Like the seventh-century apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius, John gives the Axumite king a Constantinian role and makes him comparable to a Roman emperor, a testimony to the long-lasting impact of the Axumite expedition within Syriac writing and Miaphysite circles.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Malalas, 18. 6 and 18. 14 (ed. Dindorf, 427 and 436); Procopius, *Wars*, 8. 4. 9–13 (ed. Haury, 2. 520). See also discussions in Fowden, *Commonwealth*, 101–2 and Obolensky, *Commonwealth*, 60–1.

<sup>55</sup> Malalas, 18. 15 (ed. Dindorf, 436).

<sup>56</sup> For the importance of Ethiopia in pseudo-Methodius, see G. Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius: a concept of history in response to the rise of Islam', in Averil Cameron

But, if John's history reflects the influential memories of Axumite intervention in the Yemen, then the person of Simeon beth Arsham also embodied an even wider geographical idea of Christianity. Here, beyond the Roman world, John's presentation of Miaphysite missions is as much a continuation of the missions of Edessa, and that city's struggles against heresy, as part of the ecclesiastical historians' narrative of Roman Christianity. John's *Life of Simeon the Persian Debater* describes how Simeon 'laboured against the deceiving schools of Nestorius . . . in all countries where Christ's teaching travelled . . . to the east, the north and the south'.<sup>57</sup> John's Simeon is like an eastern counterpart to his image of John of Tella, responsible for all the lands beyond the Roman empire. Simeon's journeys may have reminded a Mesopotamian audience of Edessa's missionary importance and the city's religious history. John calls Persia 'a country of Nestorius, Bardaisan, Marcion and Mani' and notes that Nestorianism had been removed from Edessa and had fled to Persia.<sup>58</sup> Simeon's role as an opponent of the ancient heresies of Edessa confirms the place of Simeon and his Miaphysite theology in an Edessene orthodox canon, to a local orthodox history that goes back to the attacks against Manichaeism and Marcionism by Ephraem and, in the historical imagination, by Addai himself. By placing Nestorianism and the School of Edessa in this list, John places the Cyrilline part of the fifth century into Simeon's orthodox ancestry: Simeon demonstrates his orthodoxy by opposing a theology that was seen as heretical by all parties within the sixth-century Roman empire (this life is one of the few examples of Christological exposition in John's *Lives*, during one of Simeon's debates with the Nestorians).<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Simeon's attack on these exiled Edessene heresies reaffirms the city's connection with Persia: the reforming process that has occurred within the city, culminating in the expulsion of the School by its Miaphysite opponents, is being extended into the lands it had traditionally influenced in the Persian empire.

and L. Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*. Vol. 1: *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), 149–97, esp. 160–3.

<sup>57</sup> *Lives*, (ed. Brooks, 1. 138 and 155).

<sup>58</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 139).

<sup>59</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 148–50).

John's view of Simeon's mission as the continuation of earlier reformations and missions of Edessa presents the expansion of Miaphysitism within the Christian historical narrative established by Edessa. Persian Miaphysitism has been displaced from the narrative of the Christian Roman empire that had been produced by earlier ecclesiastical historians. Simultaneously, John's vision of an international Christian community recognises the importance of temporal rulers. Simeon successfully appeals to Anastasius to help the Miaphysites of Persia, affirming the importance of an orthodox [Miaphysite] emperor as a protector of Christians everywhere on the model of Constantine.<sup>60</sup> But this model is subject to the emperor's orthodoxy: after Anastasius' death it is the Negus Caleb who receives Simeon's appeals and who sends help, as it is in the traditions on the martyrs of Najran.<sup>61</sup> Significantly, Simeon's activity in a Persian environment even leads John to present Zoroastrian Persians as good arbitrators of Simeon's debates with the Nestorians.<sup>62</sup> This may reflect the idea that the opinion of Persians represents a kind of natural law, whereby Persians endorsement of a position represents a fundamental truth, visible even to non-Christians, which it would be perverse and heretical to oppose.<sup>63</sup> Alternatively, it could reflect Simeon's success in converting Zoroastrians.<sup>64</sup> In either case, this life, that acknowledges the Persians as suitable adjudicators for Christians, could also be seen as a logical continuation of the Miaphysites' search for protection by a political power and the watering down of the Roman emperor's monopoly on authority over Christians. Lying behind the stories that John tells, we may see the Miaphysites in Persia following the tactics of the Church of the East in appealing to the support of Persian magnates and hoping, ultimately, for the conversion of the shah.

The political thought of Christians within Persia is only marginally treated by John. However, John does address the issue of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of non-Christians in a series of vignettes about

<sup>60</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 142–3).

<sup>61</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 153).

<sup>62</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 143–7).

<sup>63</sup> Compare the discussion of imperial authority in Elias' *Life of John of Tella*. See Chapter 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 1. 140).

the Jafnids, the Miaphysite clan that controlled the larger Ghassanid federation, which was allied to the Romans for much of the sixth century. Before dealing with Miaphysite attitudes to the Jafnid phylarchs Harith and al-Mundhir in detail, it is necessary to step back to examine the development of images of the Arabs in Christian Roman thought in general terms. This will allow us to trace how Chalcedonian and Miaphysite views of the Arabs diverged, and to examine the increasingly successful military opportunism of the Ghassanids in the late sixth century, which coincided with their importance as sponsors of the Miaphysites.

### PART III

#### Civilising the Arabs: Christianity and Diplomacy

Commentators on the Arabs from the Roman Levant had long been accustomed to make distinctions between different kinds of Arabs.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Ammianus Marcellinus, an Antiochene with military experience in the borderlands with Persia, distinguishes between the ‘Arabes beati’ of the cities of Yemen and the ‘saraceni’ or ‘scenitae’, the tent-dwelling nomads of the Jazira and the peninsula.<sup>66</sup> Distinctions, which were rooted partly in ethnic identity and partly in behaviour, could be warped by polemic but might reflect a significant social reality: not all groups of ‘Arabs’ had achieved the same degree of organisation, but they were universally condemned as violent and uncivilised barbarians.

<sup>65</sup> M. MacDonald, “Les Arabes en Syrie” or “La pénétration des Arabes en Syrie”. A question of perceptions?, in *La Syrie hellénistique*, *Topoi* supp. 4 (Lyons, 2003), 303–18 warns us about the ‘messiness’ of the term Arab, since it is very rarely used as a self-designation, and Arabian languages, whether Old Arabic or the Ancient North Arabian dialects, such as Safaitic, were mostly unwritten. However, I am more concerned here with how the sedentary sources regarded the Arabs: I will discuss the Christianisation of nomads living between Rome and Persia, termed Arabs, Saracens, Tayyoye, or Ishmaelites in the sources, and refer to them as Arabs, without implying anything about their *self-designation*.

<sup>66</sup> *Res Gestae* 14.3.4 on the Scenitae (tr. Rolfe, 1. 27) and 23.6.45–7 on the *arabes beati* (tr. Rolfe, 2. 375).

The relations between settled and nomadic populations of the Levant were fluid, and could oscillate from trade and intermarriage, for nomadic populations deprived of urban luxuries, weapons, and cereals,<sup>67</sup> to settlement (as occurred at Petra or Lakhmid Hira),<sup>68</sup> to conflict, as groups deprived of suitable opportunities for trade, in need of pasture after some environmental disaster or in possession of some military advantage, sought to expand or expropriate wealth from neighbours.<sup>69</sup> In late antiquity at least, the Roman empire's attempts to control this oscillating behaviour through relations with more organised, possibly more settled, princely clans meant that simple stereotypes against barbaric 'Scenitae' were adapted in the course of the Christianisation and sponsorship of Arab federate groups.

Robert Hoyland has suggested that the fourth century saw an expansion in the power of larger and more organized groups from southern Arabia at the expense of the many smaller groups attested in the Safaitic epigraphy of the north of the peninsula and the Jazira. This process may have been connected with the attractions of Roman military service, a process comparable to the 'ethnogenesis' of the Goths and other Germanic peoples on the Rhine and Danube frontiers, in which larger federations were formed in response to Roman resources and prestige, and used to control the endemic raiding of smaller groups.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> B. De Vries, 1999, *Umm El-Jimal* (Portsmouth, RI, 1999), 236, suggests that trade with nomads was the cause of the prosperity of the Hauran town of Umm el-Jimal. A. Lewin, 'Roman urban defences in the east in late antiquity: the case of the Negev', in D. Freeman and C. Kennedy (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1985), 267–75, describes an example of this symbiosis from the fourth century: even if slaves were seized from the settled population, they still had to be sold at entrepôts such as Shivta, and it was in the best interests of local phylarchs to keep violent individuals in check because of the potential benefits of trade.

<sup>68</sup> Note the derision against Arabs 'who have Nabatised' in the era of the Islamic conquests. C. Trimmingham, 1979, *Christianity Amongst the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York, 1979), 147.

<sup>69</sup> For example, Barsauma of Nisibis reports that Roman and Persian federates clashed over pasture rights during a period of drought. F. Nau, *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mesopotamie et de Syrie du VIIe et VIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1933), 15.

<sup>70</sup> R. Hoyland, 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts and the beginnings of (Muslim) Arab historical memory in late Roman inscriptions', in H. Cotton and



The Christian sources reflect this increased contact and organization of Arab federate groups in various ways. Jerome's *Life of Malchus* describes the 'Ishmaelites' like Ammianus' Huns, with 'long flowing hair and half-naked bodies'.<sup>71</sup> Jerome's opinion reflects the unreformed prejudice of the classical world against its nomadic neighbours, a prejudice that may well have been confirmed by periodic raiding and slave-taking of the edges of settlement during times of dearth. When 'Arabs' are converted, like the inhabitants of Elusa are in the *Life of Hilarion*, they are mere foils for the saint's piety, lacking all agency in the story.<sup>72</sup>

However, the Arabs could also be useful to the Roman state. War with Persia remained a serious possibility, breaking out briefly in 420 and 441, causing both sides to seek clients among the Arabs and in the Caucasus, a search in which the Christianity of the Romans functioned as a badge of membership, a tool for the elites of these federate groups and, in some cases, a vehicle by which such groups could be incorporated into the Roman state.<sup>73</sup> Arab clients, who were increasingly bound to the empire by Christianity, represented both a means of controlling the raids of small frontier groups and opening up an alternative potential front against Persia across the desert. We see this diplomatic and religious tension reflected in the Syriac *Life of Symeon*: when the Lakhmid phylarch Numan is enquiring about Symeon's powers, a chieftain tells him 'If you allow your people to go to him they will become Christian and follow the Romans'. This leads Numan to refuse to convert since he is a servant of the Persian shah, though he does allow his people to convert.<sup>74</sup> In this era before the Christological crises and the definitive allegiance of the Church of the East to 'Nestorianism', Christianity was both a symbol of a

D. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. 11–13 and 27–9.

<sup>71</sup> Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, 4 (ed. PL 22, col. 55).

<sup>72</sup> Jerome, *Life of Hilarion*, 25 (ed. PL 22, col. 41).

<sup>73</sup> The treatment of Christian Arab federates was a potential *casus belli* during this cold war, see Stein, *Histoire*, 1. 279–81 and 291. The importance of the Persian threat is revealed by recurrent accusations of conspiracy with Persia against court figures, such as Ardaburius in 469 and Ilus in the 480s. Stein, *Histoire*, 1. 358 and 2. 28–31.

<sup>74</sup> Syriac *Life of Symeon*, 67 (tr. Doran, 146–7).

Roman alliance and, it seems, an attractive option for Persia's Arab clients.

These potentially useful 'Arab' nomad groups might be rendered more acceptable through the re-imagining of their ethnic origins using the Bible. Various Christian writers had struggled with the etymologies and relationships of Ishmaelite, Hagarene, Skenite, and the standard military and political term for Rome's nomadic allies, Saracen.<sup>75</sup> This was complicated by the practice of circumcision and abstinence from pork amongst some of these populations, which led to theories surrounding their Abrahamic descent from Sarah or Ishmael and their contacts with the Jews.<sup>76</sup> For Jerome, the question of the origins of these nomads could be resolved in order to distance them from membership in a civilized Christian world, emphasizing that they had only called themselves Saracens as a ruse, to conceal their descent from the slave Ishmael.<sup>77</sup> As Garnsey has noted of the Cappadocian Fathers, Aristotelian natural slave theories could be updated for the Christian era by appealing to the descent of 'barbarians' from ideal types of the barbarian slave such as Esau, Canaan or, in this instance, Ishmael.<sup>78</sup>

But the hagiography of Cyril of Scythopolis shows how this Biblical natural slavery could also be adapted to a changed political situation where the saint improves the barbarians among whom he lives. His saint Sabas converts Isaurians who 'promised to God to no longer harm anyone, but to renounce lawlessness (*παρανομία*) and devote their time to farming'.<sup>79</sup> In a later scene Sabas gives food to starving 'Saracens', who later bring dates and figs to his cell, causing him to exclaim: 'What trouble have these barbarians taken to express thanks for a service that was as nothing. What [more] should we ungrateful wretches (*ἐλεεινοί*) do, who enjoy divine favour yet waste our lives in indolence'.<sup>80</sup> These scenes both connect lawful, Christian

<sup>75</sup> F. Millar, 'The Theodosian Empire (408–450) and the Arabs: Saracens or Ishmaelites?', in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2005), 297–314, at 302–3.

<sup>76</sup> Millar, 'Arabs', 305–11.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Millar, 'Arabs', 304.

<sup>78</sup> P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge 1996), 43–5.

<sup>79</sup> *Life of Sabas*, 34 (ed. Schwartz, 120).

<sup>80</sup> *Life of Sabas*, 13 (ed. Schwartz, 96).

life to cultivation and the second implies that the barbarians normally cannot be expected to practice good behaviour such as reciprocal gift-giving, making them a suitable contrast for ungrateful monks.<sup>81</sup> As Binns notes, this ties into Cyril's vision of monasticism as a physical 'city of the desert', that realised Athanasius' metaphor in the *Life of Antony* in the colonisation of a marginal zone, and that fortified a vulnerable frontier against Persia and the Lakhmid Arab confederation with both walls and prayer. Imperial policy and the saint's neutralisation and improvement of the Arabs' harsh environment coincided.<sup>82</sup>

A detailed case of the conversion of Arab tribesmen, that exemplifies the coincidence of military concerns and the religious and social improvement of barbarians, exists in the meeting of Euthymius and Aspebetus early in Cyril's account.<sup>83</sup> The scene is set during the persecution of Persian Christians by the magi during the rule of Yazdgard I, when Aspebetus, an Arab phylarch<sup>84</sup> allied to the Persians fled to the Romans in the hope of finding a cure for his son, who had been paralysed by a demon and who could not be cured by pagan magicians. Aspebetus encounters a Roman general, Anatolius, 'who bound (ἐνεχείρισεν) Aspebtus as chief of the Saracens in Arabia in alliance (ὑποσπόνδων) with Rome'. His son Terebon then meets Euthymius after being summoned to his lavra by a dream, complains of his illness and the inability of pagan magic to cure him, he says that 'if you take pity on my sickness, I will become a Christian and renounce lawlessness and pagan worship'. The scene concludes with the conversion of the Arab phylarch and all his family and retinue and the entrance of the first Arab monks at Euthymius' monastery.

The scene illustrates the connection of Christianity and Roman identity in this era, before the Christological splintering of later generations. And it demonstrates the saint's power and Christian

<sup>81</sup> Though Sabas is also prepared to destroy intransigent barbarians e.g. *Life of Sabas*, 14 (ed. Schwartz, 97) where he causes Arabs who attack him to be swallowed up by the ground.

<sup>82</sup> J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: Monasteries of Palestine*, 314–631 (Oxford 1994), 88.

<sup>83</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 10 (ed. Schwartz, 18–21).

<sup>84</sup> Aspebetus is a corruption of 'spahbed', a Persian general. See I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, 1989), 44.

truth by superior thaumaturgy in driving out Terebon's demon, an act that is achieved by conversion itself, which Terebon himself sees as a rejection of lawlessness and paganism. This act of transformation is seen by Cyril in the following way:

he let them depart no longer Hagarenes and Ishmaelites, but descendants of Sarah and heirs of the promise (τῆς ἐπαγγελίας κληρονόμος γερόντας), transferred through baptism from slavery into freedom' and 'those who had been the wolves of Arabia have joined the rational flock of Christ.<sup>85</sup>

This phrase shows us that Cyril sees the transformation of the Arabs in baptism as the transfer between two predetermined identities rooted in Biblical genealogy, one positive and one negative. It is a contrast that may draw on the different presentations of nomadic life in the Old Testament, and provides a positive conceptual category that can include Rome's nomadic allies, who are rehabilitated by their orthodoxy, while still preserving a negative category for other Arab groups who must be opposed.<sup>86</sup> For Cyril, military allegiance and a lawful existence are subordinated to (orthodox) baptism. So the text's political thought reflects the strongly Christian identity projected by Justinian's empire. Settlement and monastic membership are only a corollary of conversion for some of Aspebetus' retinue: the allegiance of Aspebetus to Anatolius as a Roman phylarch shows that most of the Arabs would provide warriors for the Romans rather than providing monks.

### Keeping the Arabs in Check: Bostra and Rusafa

Thus, Arab groups were attractive allies to the late Roman empire. The oscillation of such groups between conflict and trade depended on the opportunities available, and the Romans could manipulate this relationship to their own advantage, promoting and giving resources to certain families to control wider federate groups. These ruling families would then tax and police trade within the

<sup>85</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 10 and 15 (ed. Schwartz, 18–21; 24–5).

<sup>86</sup> See J. Flight, 'The nomadic idea and ideal in the Old Testament', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 42 (1923), 158–226.

Jazira and the Arab peninsula; to manage smaller groups to prevent opportunistic raiding or to attack the Persians.<sup>87</sup> Christianity provided a seal for this political relationship: some groups of Arabs could be promoted to the edges of the civilized world. Christianisation both allowed their participation in a world of ecclesiastical politics while, in the long term, differentiating these groups from potential Persian paymasters.

The late fifth and early sixth centuries provide us with an example of how one group of Arabs might be promoted as the master of others. In the 470s, the empire was undergoing considerable economic and political crisis. This era of reduced prestige saw Lazica in the Caucasus drift out of Roman influence and an Arab freebooter named Amorkesos seize the entrepôt of Jotaba by the Red Sea.<sup>88</sup> The emperor Leo, unable to punish him, allowed him to convert to Christianity and bestowed greater honours upon him.<sup>89</sup> However, in 498 Anastasius, following the economic recovery of the empire and the defeat of the Isaurian rebellion, sent an expedition to recapture Jotaba.<sup>90</sup> Incorporation into the empire's religious and political patronage network, while it might have extended imperial influence during times of strength, could be abused by potential federates in times of imperial weakness. Indeed, Leo's actions had been criticised by contemporaries who said that it was foolish to try to impress one's enemies in a time of weakness: shows of prestige, which might in the long term reduce military costs, had to be backed up by real strength.

But if the empire had to demonstrate its strength to make proper use of its prestige, then so did its potential Arab allies, both to become federates and to receive more from their relationship with Rome. In the 490s, the Levant experienced a series of raids from

<sup>87</sup> See M. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids: writing the history of a sixth-century tribal dynasty', in J. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (Portsmouth, 1996), 2, 207–24 on the Jafnid control of the Ghassanids and M. Kister, 'Al-Hira', *Arabica* 15 (1968), 145–69 for the comparable example of the Nasrid control of the Lakhmids, drawn from later Islamic sources.

<sup>88</sup> M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982), 95–6.

<sup>89</sup> Malchus, fr. 1 (ed. Blockley, 2, 404–6).

<sup>90</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity*, 114.

Arabs of the Ghassanid and Kindite confederations.<sup>91</sup> Rome's clients, the Salih confederation, were defeated by their enemies after failing to extract taxes from the newcomers or preventing them from settling in their pastureland.<sup>92</sup> The Roman response, rather than allowing their enemies to be employed by the Persians, was to accept them as replacements of the Salih and, probably, to confirm this new relationship by the religious conversion of some elites.<sup>93</sup> The attacks of the Kinda and Ghassan might be presented as demonstrations of their suitability for employment through their prowess, as much as an attempt to gain resources by raiding.

The aristocratic core to these confederations could command widespread support while remaining extremely vulnerable. Much of their prestige came from Roman honours, though it could be supplemented when victory in battle drew new followers to them, and the settled powers could restrict their ability to buy grain or weapons.<sup>94</sup> Even if this aristocratic core was settled, as may have been the case in Jafnid Jabiya, logistic demands meant that, like any small nomad group, they were still forced into symbiosis with settled powers.

The Romans manipulated this relationship by controlling and fortifying oasis sites, with the necessary water to provide for flocks of animals and mounted warriors alike. Sergeant's fieldwork in the Hadramawt, which he supplements with anecdotes from seventh-century Islamic history, suggests that these oases, *harams* such as Mecca, were frequently objects of pilgrimage, when religious devotion, and the legal arbitration and occasions for diplomacy that accompanied it, coincided with the seasonal prosperity of the oasis.<sup>95</sup> In the context of the Christianisation of the Arabs, these

<sup>91</sup> S. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: a History of the Arabian Frontier* (Winter Lake, 1986), 151.

<sup>92</sup> Sartre, *Trois études*, 155–61 and Hoyland, *Arabia*, 239–40.

<sup>93</sup> Shahid, *BASIC*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> The attack of al-Nu'man on Bostra in 584 may have been attempts to retrieve weapons, 'our father's arms'. John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 42 (ed. Brooks, 177). See Procopius, *Wars*, 1. 19. 25 (ed. Haury, 1. 104) for Roman laws against dealing in iron to certain barbarians.

<sup>95</sup> R. Sergeant, 'Haram and hawtah, the sacred enclosure in Arabia', in A. Badawi (ed.), *Mélanges Taha Hussein* (Cairo, 1962), 41–58; D. Eickelman, 'Musaylima', *JESHO* 10 (1969), 17–52, at 25–6.

pilgrimages to *harams* took the form of devotion to the rider saint Sergius, whose cult became popular amongst Arab Christians of all varieties.<sup>96</sup>

I suggest that the creation or fortification and enlargement of two major sites of the Sergius cult by the Romans, Bostra and Rusafa, in the 510s reflects a wish to harness the nomads' need for water and trade and, potentially, their customary pilgrimage routes to a Roman institution, where they could be Christianised further and where they could be monitored, impressed, rewarded or, as we shall see, eliminated.<sup>97</sup> Bostra, the capital of the Roman province of Arabia, lies within the Hauran, the region of transhumance and settled agriculture in the heartland of what later Arab geographers would present as the territory controlled by the Ghassanids, the area where they would build most of their churches and probably lived.<sup>98</sup> Bostra possessed large reservoirs, the seat of a military *dux* and the pilgrimage church of Sergius, with a large secular reception hall.<sup>99</sup>

As well as being the site from which grain, water and weapons could be distributed to Rome's Arab clients, Bostra was also a centre from which Rome could back up its political posturing with military force and attract Arab pilgrims to the shrine of Sergius, where the audience hall could be used by Roman officials or favoured Arab leaders to address these allied warriors.<sup>100</sup> The construction of an audience hall for the use of favoured Arabs may be part of a wider initiative to transform Arab military quarrels into political quarrels conducted through existing channels of Roman administration and politics. We see this in Cyril of Scythopolis' *Life of Euthymius*, when the *dux* of Bostra supports the complaints of an Arab magnate

<sup>96</sup> H. Charles, *La Christianisation des Arabes Nomads sur les Limes et dans le Desert Syro-Mesopotamien aux alentours de Hegire* (Paris, 1936), 35 and E. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, (Berkeley, 1999), 96.

<sup>97</sup> For construction in Rusafa and Bostra see Greatrex and Lieu, *Rome and Persia*, 77 and Trimmingham, *Christianity*, 77. Another example of the Christianisation of pre-existent *haram* sites is Elusa in the *Life of Hilarion*.

<sup>98</sup> C. Foss, 'Syria in transition: 550–750. An archacological approach', *DOP* 51 (1997), 189–269, at 245–6; J. Sauvaget, 'Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis', *Byzantion* 14 (1939), 115–30, at 121; Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 145.

<sup>99</sup> Foss, 'Syria', 237, 239, and 241. The church of Sergius is clearly distinct from the city's cathedral, which may have been intended for the local population.

<sup>100</sup> For the distribution of grain and weapons from Bostra see Foss, 'Syria', 251 and John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 42 (ed. Brooks, 177).

against Euthymius' client Terebon: inter-tribal feuds had to find legitimate Roman channels in this world of competing phylarchs who were all Roman allies.<sup>101</sup> It may also be significant that Bostra, though it is not a large city, had one of the first mosques built in Syria: perhaps Umayyad caliphs sought to follow the Romans' example and use the site to demonstrate their religious and political message as well as to manage their Beduin clients.<sup>102</sup>

Where Bostra was important because of its position in the centre of a prosperous region from which the Ghassanids fed and supplied their troops, the oasis of Rusafa, the supposed site of Sergius' execution, is situated at the cusp of two trade routes, between the Roman and Persian empires and the Arab peninsula. It lay well beyond the concentration of Ghassanid building in the Hauran: its many churches surrounded by fortifications seem to have been intended, at least in the first instance, to serve as a logistic node in the event of Persian attack, defended by its walls and relics, and to impress local Arab groups under the control of non-Jafnid phylarchs.<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Fowden has emphasised the presence of an audience hall outside the city walls, which includes an inscription from the Ghassanid phylarch al-Mundhir: 'May al-Mundhir triumph.'<sup>104</sup> But it is important to emphasise that this building, like the patronage of the Sergius cult by the Persian shah Khusrau II, are developments of the 580s and 590s, in which the Jafnid king began to attempt to annexe the functions of the Roman shrine-city and use religious forms himself to impress Arab clients, rather than rely on those constructed and managed by the Romans.

### The Ghassanids: Military Opportunism and Religious Independence

The Ghassanid confederation rose to power gradually during the sixth century. We should be cautious not to back-project their

<sup>101</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 34 (ed. Schwartz, 52).

<sup>102</sup> Foss, 'Syria', 242.

<sup>103</sup> For the Persian siege of Rusafa see Evagrius, *HE* 4. 18 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 168).

<sup>104</sup> Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 151 and 168.



importance to their initial treaty in 502, nor to assume that they were always Miaphysite (or even all Christian), nor that their Christianity would make them 'loyal servants of the empire'.<sup>105</sup> These are all faults that blight Irfan Shahid's *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, which tries to explain away the criticisms of historians such as Procopius and Evagrius against the Ghassanids as Greek-speaking or Chalcedonian bias, in favour of the representations of John of Ephesus, the Islamic poetry, or much later Syriac historians such as Bar as Hebraeus ('Miaphysite and hence knowledgeable').<sup>106</sup> We cannot hope to reconstruct a detailed political history for the Ghassanids, but we can examine what motivated the different sources of the sedentary world to take such different views of the Ghassanids, and acknowledge that this is likely to be rooted in real events as well as in prejudice and political thought. However, despite its flaws, Shahid's work still represents the most complete collection of data on the Ghassanids, and I will refer to it in this capacity, rather than for its analysis.

While they, like other Arab kinglets in the early sixth century, were the subject of missionary activity and may have patronised clerics, as we see in the *Jabiya Letter*, the Ghassanids achieved real prestige and importance during the first of Justinian's wars with Persia. The coincidence of the disintegration of the Kindite confederation, following a botched attempt by Diomedes, the *dux* of Bostra, to enforce his authority over the Kindite phylarch and the latter's capture and execution by the Lakhmids, and the Samaritan revolt of 529 forced the emperor to grant more power to the Ghassan.<sup>107</sup> The success of their phylarch, Harith bar Gabala, and the emperor's local manpower shortage, following the disarming of the Samaritans, coupled with the threat of the Lakhmids, prompted the emperor to organise the

<sup>105</sup> For instance, Shahid's assumption that the Ghassanids were important in the early sixth century forces him to invent a political crisis, in which they depart from Roman service after Justin's persecutions of the Miaphysites, to account for their absence during the wars in Himyar. Shahid, *Martyrs*, 147 and id., *BASIC* 15–30.

<sup>106</sup> Shahid, *BASIC*. 34.

<sup>107</sup> The death of Harith the Kindite is in Theophanes, *AM* 5990 (ed. de Boor, 141). He is described under 'Arethas' in *PLRE II*, 128. Diomedes is 'Diomedes 1' in *PLRE III*, 402. The use of Arab federates to put down the Samaritans is in Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 9. 8 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 232), discussed in Shahid, *BASIC* 84–7.

Ghassanids into a kind of super-phylarchate in 530, responsible for all the 'Roman Arabs'.<sup>108</sup> This organisation was followed by the gradual mothballing of most of the fortified line of the desert's edge: the cheapest alternative for an emperor with military requirements in the West was to entrust this frontier as far as possible to federate allies.<sup>109</sup>

The relationship between the Ghassanids and the Romans was predicated on each side trying to extract the maximum advantage from the other. Threats from the Lakhmids and the demands of wars on many fronts made the organisation of a super-phylarchate necessary, but over-mighty leaders, who could command a larger following and make greater demands from their Roman allies, needed to be eliminated lest they back up their demands with force. This reconstruction has parallels on the Danube frontier in the fifth century, when Zeno played off different Gothic confederations against one another, using the lure of imperial recognition and material supplies to attract the allegiance of former enemies, and in the fourth, when Valens accepted the migration of the Tervingi across the Danube before trying to have their leaders assassinated, hoping to absorb their rank and file into the regular army.<sup>110</sup>

The fluctuation of Roman-Ghassanid relations in the sixth century should be seen in the light of this model, in which barbarian allies tried to make the most of positions of strength and use Roman resources, of prestige and ideology as well as arms and money, to maximise their bargaining position and extend their following. Thus Procopius' report that the Ghassanid phylarch Harith bar Gabala concealed his whereabouts from the Roman general Belisarius during their invasion of Persian Mesopotamia in 541 is believable.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> I infer the disarming of the Samaritans, who had been used in Roman forces in the fifth century, after their revolt in 529. See Crown, 'Byzantine orbit', 126-39. Procopius, *Wars*, 1.17, 45-8 (ed. Haury, I, 90) refers to Harith being put in control of 'as many clans as possible'. Harith the Ghassanid is described under 'Arethas' in *PI.RE III*, 111-13. These changes took place in the context of the reorganisation of the Palestinian provinces. See P. Mayerson, 'Justinian's Novella 103 and the reorganization of Palestine', *BASOR* 269 (1988), 65-71.

<sup>109</sup> Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, 152; Sauvaget, 'Sergiopolis', 124.

<sup>110</sup> P. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1998), 131 and 154-65.

<sup>111</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 2. 19. 26-46 (ed. Haury, I, 235-7).

It reflects both Harith's wish to maximise his advantage from the war, through booty that could be redistributed to his followers, and the diverging interests of the regular army, whose position Procopius represents. Shahid's presumption that all criticisms of the Ghassanids are unjust fails to consider the different objectives of Roman and Ghassanid leaders and Rome's long-standing ruthless treatment of its allies.<sup>112</sup>

The wars between Rome and Persia were accompanied by a proxy war between their Arab clients, which continued even in periods of official peace.<sup>113</sup> This fuelled an increasingly personal vendetta between the ruling houses of the Lakhmids and the Ghassanids, culminating in the execution of Harith's son by the Lakhmid Mundhir bar Shaqqa and Harith's killing of Mundhir at Chalcis in 554.<sup>114</sup> This victory over their rivals increased the political prestige of the Ghassan and the peace treaty that followed in 561 recognised the increased importance of the Arab kingdoms by including clauses to forbid their private wars and to ensure that trade between Rome and Persia passed through Edessa and Nisibis, rather than across the permeable boundary between the Arab polities.<sup>115</sup> Both Rome and Persia recognised the importance of the Arab polities but wished to keep tax revenues for themselves and to restrict their opportunities for further growth to a level where they could not be controlled. Within court circles, Harith's increased prestige is shown by his visit to Constantinople in 563 to discuss the succession of his son al-Mundhir with Justinian, an event that shows both the importance of the phylarchate and the role of Roman recognition in maintaining a stable succession.<sup>116</sup>

Two inscriptions from the same decade shed further light on the growing importance of the Jafnid phylarch and the effects of his wider recognition near his power base in the Hauran. An inscription

<sup>112</sup> Shahid, *BASIC* 301–6.

<sup>113</sup> e.g. Greatrex and Lieu, *Rome and Persia*, 100 and 123.

<sup>114</sup> Michael the Syrian, 9. 33 (ed. Chabot, 269).

<sup>115</sup> Shahid, *BASIC* 267–71, discussing Menander Protector (ed. Blockley 70–3).

<sup>116</sup> Theophanes, AM 5995 (ed. de Boor, 144). Also see Shahid, *BASIC* 282–4.

For another example of Roman recognition aiding the stable succession of client kings see Procopius, *Wars*, 8. 9.8 (ed. Haury, II, 526) on the Roman marriages of the Lazic kings.

in the monastery of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi uses Harith's reign as a dating system, instead of the indictional year or a local civic era, and refer to him by his Roman honorific title of Flavius.<sup>117</sup> While the monks of the province of Arabia were impressed by Harith's Roman honorifics, they also saw Harith as a political leader of greater local significance than the emperor or the imperial tax cycle. The second inscription, from Harran south of Damascus in Phoenicia Libanensis, is trilingual, in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, composed for the dedication of a martyrion in 568 on behalf of a minor phylarch named Sharahil.<sup>118</sup> It is the first use of epigraphic Arabic that does not just transcribe proper names. Though this Sharahil does not seem to be a Jafnid, he may have been a subordinate phylarch within the Ghassanid confederation. At any rate, the presence of epigraphic Arabic testifies to the language's increased cultural importance, which one might tentatively connect to the sponsorship of poetry by the Ghassanids and the subsequent development of a Arab self-awareness, of a sense of the unity of the language, people and customs, of an Arab ethnē, that lies at the back of the Qu'ran.<sup>119</sup>

The victories and subsequent elimination of Harith's successor al-Mundhir continued the tendencies that we have already seen in the reign of Harith.<sup>120</sup> Following Harith's death, Mundhir defeated two Lakhmid raids on his territory in 569 and 570, which he followed by requests for gold from the newly acceded Justin II. Justin responded by trying to have Mundhir assassinated in 570, prompting Mundhir to withdraw himself from Roman service until 574. Shahid presents these as 'pyrrhic victories' for Mundhir, excusing his demands from Justin as necessary stipends for a damaged phylarchate, but we could equally see these as opportunistic attempts by Mundhir to receive greater rewards for greater successes.<sup>121</sup> Mundhir's withdrawal from service was followed by Lakhmid successes against the Romans until

<sup>117</sup> D. Schlumberger, 'Les fouilles de Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi', *Syria* 20 (1939), 195–373, at 366–73; Shahid, *BASIC* 258–60.

<sup>118</sup> Shahid, *BASIC* 326; Nau, *Arabes*, 96–7.

<sup>119</sup> Hoyland, *Arabia*, 241–2.

<sup>120</sup> Al-Mundhir is described under 'Alamundur' in *PLRE III*, 34–6.

<sup>121</sup> Events described in John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 6. 3 (ed. Brooks, 280–2), discussed further below. See also Shahid, *BASIC* 339.

Tiberius renegotiated his treaty with Mundhir at Rusafa.<sup>122</sup> This second era of cooperation saw Mundhir seize Hira, possibly using the booty to found monasteries in the Hauran, after which he was twice honoured in Constantinople, receiving a crown on the latter occasion and bringing his sons with him to the capital.<sup>123</sup> Like his father, Mundhir used his victories to extract ever greater symbols of prestige and, probably, resources from the Romans, which allowed him to cement and extend his power base on the edge of the Roman frontier by behaving like a Roman aristocrat, or even like a Roman emperor, by endowing the audience hall-church at Rusafa and monasteries.

Ultimately, however, Mundhir's conflicts of interest with the Roman empire and its officials prompted his permanent removal. Theophylact Simocatta reports how the 581 campaign against Ctesiphon was ruined when Mundhir 'leader of the unreliable and fickle Saracens revealed the Roman attack to the Persians'.<sup>124</sup> Mundhir was exiled to Sicily, and after the death of one of his brothers, who had been proposed as the new king by the Romans, his sons rebelled, ravaging Roman Arabia and Palestine and seizing their father's arms from Bostra.<sup>125</sup> Mundhir's eldest son Nu'man was then invited to Constantinople on a diplomatic mission, where the emperor Maurice offered him the phylarchate in exchange for conversion to Chalcedon.<sup>126</sup> After refusing, he too was exiled and the Ghassanid confederation partially disintegrated, with many sub-phylarchs going over to the Persians, though the organisation retained its identity through the Persian wars that followed.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>122</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 6. 4 (ed. Brooks, 282–5). Discussed in Shahid, *BASIC* 358 and 374–5.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 381–99.

<sup>124</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, 3. 7. 7–11 (tr. Whitby, 82). See also the criticisms of al-Mundhir in Evagrius, *HE* 5. 20 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 216).

<sup>125</sup> Shahid, *BASIC* 462–9.

<sup>126</sup> Michael the Syrian, 10. 19 (ed. Chabot, 374). Nu'man is described under 'Naaman 3' in *PLRE III*, 908. Also see Shahid, *BASIC* 531.

<sup>127</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 42 (ed. Brooks, 176–7). Discussed in Shahid, *BASIC* 543 and *id.*, 'The restoration of the Ghassanid dynasty, A.D. 587: Dionysius of Tell-Mahre', *Aram* 5 (1993), 491–503.

## The Phylarchs and the Church: Palestine and Sinai

A subtext to the political narrative of the Ghassanids is their involvement with Miaphysitism.<sup>128</sup> Like the various Gothic groups whom the Roman empire split up, paid off, or manipulated, the Jafnids owed much of their power to Roman patronage, through material aid and symbols of rulership. And, while they could supplement this from booty and trade, the Romans would also attempt to limit this independence, as we saw in the 561 treaty. However, what sets them apart from the barbarian groups that crossed the Danube, is the presence of an increasingly independent Miaphysite church in Syria and Mesopotamia, which provided literate clergy and, I suggest, a radical political thought that was prepared to displace many of the features of the Roman emperor onto the Ghassanid phylarch.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps like those ostensible members of a later Byzantine Commonwealth, the Bulgarians under Boris in the 860s, the attempts by the empire to use Christianity to bind and influence its allies, especially in an environment when multiple versions of the religion were available, allowed these allies to use Christianity to generate local power and, in the long term, to act independently of the empire.<sup>130</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, we saw how fifth-century Christian authors removed the barbarian slur from certain Arab groups. The simple equation between Christianity and allegiance to Rome, that was an assumption of these texts, became increasingly watered down after several generations of Christological controversy. Philoxenus' letter to the Lakhmid phylarch Abu Niphur is preoccupied with the origins of Nestorianism within the Church of the East: the old equation had been replaced by three competing confessions in the lands between Persia and Rome where, after the death of Anastasius, Miaphysitism was not connected to either great power.<sup>131</sup> So while

<sup>128</sup> For a narrative of the Miaphysite movement see Chapter 6.

<sup>129</sup> Unlike the Goths' Arianism, the Ghassanids' Miaphysitism still had a presence among imperial citizens and was still, periodically, treated as part of imperial orthodoxy by agents of the emperor.

<sup>130</sup> F. Curta, *South-eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250* (Cambridge, 2006), 166–79.

<sup>131</sup> Philoxenus, *Letter to Abu Niphur* (tr. Tixeront).

Roman emperors might still claim to be in control of a wider Christian commonwealth that included Miaphysites, or even sponsor their own Miaphysite missions, independent missionary activity by Miaphysites was still suspicious.

The Ghassanids had probably converted to Christianity as part of the treaty of 502, by which they became Roman federates. As such they were relative newcomers to Christianity, living among and ruling groups who had converted as part of older federate treaties, such as the Salih, the Palestinian Arabs discussed by Cyril of Scythopolis or some of Arabs of the Sinai. I suggest that, after initially rejecting the overtures of Severus, the Ghassanids were drawn into Miaphysitism in the middle of the sixth century, at a time when the movement was clearly out of favour as an imperial orthodoxy but had many adherents in Levant. Theodora dispatched missionaries into Arabia in 533, but the first indications we see of this Jafnid Miaphysitism are the requests for bishops made by Harith bar Gabala to Theodora in 542, when Jacob Baradeus and Theodore were ordained bishops of Edessa and 'of the Arabs' and began their ministries on the Roman frontiers.<sup>132</sup> Jacob eventually extended this ministry to the ordination of bishops in the 550s, including bishops for disparate tribal groups and those ordained at Harith's personal request in 563.<sup>133</sup> Like the symbols of rulership and revenue that they received from the Romans, Christianity was one of the sources of Roman power that could be used by the Jafnids to unite the smaller tribal groups of their super-phylarhcate. But, unlike earlier Arab converts to Christianity, Miaphysitism provided a form of Christianity that was only partially sponsored by the Roman state and only occasionally treated as part of orthodoxy: the Jafnids were presented with a niche to develop a Christian political image of their own, doing so independently of the Romans and dominating earlier Arab converts to Christianity.

The hagiographic sources show us the centralisation of the leadership of Arab Christians into the hands of the Jafnids. Cyril's *Life of Euthymius* had commemorated the relationship between the

<sup>132</sup> Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 229; Charles, *Christianisation*, 65; Honigmann, *Evêques*, 157–9.

<sup>133</sup> Charles, *Christianisation*, 65; Honigmann, *Evêques*, 163.

converted phylarch Terebon and the monastery of Euthymius, emphasising a symbiosis between the Arabs' protection of the monastery and the miracles and political prestige given to them by the holy man and his monks.<sup>134</sup> But, after Euthymius' death this relationship was damaged by 'the implacable feuds (*ἀσπόνδως κινωμένων*)' of Roman federates Harith [the Kindite?] and Asovades, 'which caused anarchy, [so that], as is common knowledge, barbarians went across the desert and committed many crimes (*ἀθέμιτα*)', such as the theft of water from monastic cisterns. By this time it is necessary to distinguish between the descendants of the followers of Terebon, who know that they should go the monks when their companions require exorcism, and ignorant outsiders.<sup>135</sup> In the era of Euthymius' successor Sabas, the holy man's efforts are directed at driving away nomadic shepherds from the monastery's pastures and his water miracles fill up only the monastery's cisterns, not for their neighbours.<sup>136</sup> The arrival of new coalitions from southern Arabia and their installation as federates, and the subsequent organisation of a super-phylarchate, removed the political power of Terebon's successors in this local phylarchate and destroyed the symbiosis that he had enjoyed with Euthymius and his monastery.

The Ghassanids did not fill the place of Terebon's Arabs in this Palestinian hagiographic collection. They were far removed politically, negotiating with emperors and patriarchs rather than individual monasteries, and, at least by the time of Harith's joint patronage of Jacob Baradeus, removed by Christological confession as well, since Cyril, like the see of Jerusalem, was aligned with the Chalcedonians and the memory of Juvenal.<sup>137</sup> A similar situation, of an alliance with a local phylarch that was superseded by the Ghassanids, exists in the hagiographic tradition of Sinai, in a mid-sixth-century Christian Palestinian Aramaic account of the forty martyrs of Sinai.<sup>138</sup> This text, probably a compilation of multiple martyr accounts, describes how, after a time when the Arabs attacked the

<sup>134</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 15, 20, and 23 (ed. Schwartz, 24–5, 33, 36).

<sup>135</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 51 (ed. Schwartz, 75).

<sup>136</sup> *Life of Sabas*, 59 and 66–7 (ed. Schwartz, 160–1 and 167–9).

<sup>137</sup> *Life of Euthymius*, 27 (ed. Schwartz, 41–2).

<sup>138</sup> Blemmye raids and reference to Peter [the Fuller] as patriarch of Alexandria situate the events described in the late fifth century, though the text was probably



monks, one Abba Moses 'gave [the monks] dominion over the evil spirits of the desert and allowed its inhabitants to be made Christian'.<sup>139</sup> These Arab inhabitants exchange Egyptian grain for dates with the monks and eventually the Arab chief of Pharan submits to baptism as part of his exorcism from demons.<sup>140</sup> Again, there is a symbiosis between the Arabs and the monks: in return for his exorcism, the kings of Pharan defend the monks from the Blemmyes and give clothes to the monks.<sup>141</sup>

Like the Palestinian account, the Sinaitic tale emphasises the importance of this local phylarch as a local guarantor of the peace for the Chalcedonian monastery. In this case, we can see how the Miaphysite hagiographic tradition annexed this local relationship and bestowed it upon Harith bar Gabala and Jacob Baradeus. Miaphysite hagiographers celebrate Harith's role in sponsoring the ordination of bishops in the East, a critical event in the evolution of a separate Miaphysite church, in general terms. John of Ephesus added Harith to his second *Life of Jacob and Theodore*, where he had been absent from his first account, which may reflect the phylarch's developing prestige. But, in addition to this, the anonymous *Life of Jacob Baradeus* celebrates the saint's good relationship with the phylarch in the same breath as annexing an older relationship between the Chalcedonian monks of Sinai and local Arabs. After some Arabs have been struck by madness, Harith sends for Jacob and the saint informs him that one of his magnates has captured a Sinaite monk. Harith orders the prisoner released and kills his captor, after which his people are freed from madness.<sup>142</sup> As we saw earlier in this chapter, there is still a dual vision of the Arabs in the Christian sources. The traditional image of the Arabs as lawless and prone to madness or possession is still present, but Harith is placed above his barbaric subjects. He alone is privy to this special relationship with the saint and only he is in a position to respond to the saint's *parrhēsia* and have the

written after Justinian's fortification and enlargement of the monastery complex at Sinai in the 530s.

<sup>139</sup> *Forty Martyrs of Sinai* (ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, 24).

<sup>140</sup> *Forty Martyrs of Sinai* (ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, 27–8).

<sup>141</sup> *Forty Martyrs of Sinai* (ed. Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, 39 and 62).

<sup>142</sup> *Life of Jacob Baradeus* (ed. Brooks, 233–5).

monk freed. Moreover, this relationship eclipses the older, more local relationships remembered in the Sinaite text: the relationship between the Jafnid Harith and the Miaphysite Jacob overshadows that of the king of Pharan and the monks of Sinai.

Thus, by acting as a patron of the wide-ranging Jacob Baradeus, Harith could create a wider symbiosis than had hitherto existed between Arab phylarchs and Christian holy men. His position as a super-phylarch could be confirmed by recognition of jurisdiction over all the Arabs allied with Rome, simultaneously annexing the relationships between older phylarchates and the Chalcedonians. But the significance of Ghassanid Miaphysitism, and of the symbiosis between the Jafnids and Miaphysite churchmen, extended beyond Jafnid control of subordinate Arab groups into their annexation of aspects of Roman Christian political thought and the assumption of unique prerogatives of Christian Roman emperors.

### The Phylarchs and the Church: Jafnid Patronage and Leadership

The ordinations of Jacob and Theodore had been undertaken at the behest of three or four individuals. Harith's request for bishops to minister to his people had been accepted by Theodora, probably acting as patron of the Miaphysites with the consent of her husband, and the ordinations were actually performed by Theodore, the exiled patriarch of Alexandria. As I emphasised in the previous chapter, imperial policy towards the Miaphysites in the 540s mirrors that of fifth century emperors to the Novatians: they were not heretics and their activities might serve the empire, as John of Ephesus' missionary campaigns in Anatolia did in this decade. Indeed, the Syriac continuator of Zachariah of Mytilene saw the ordinations of Jacob and Theodore as an initiative aimed at Miaphysites in Persia, not Arabs allied to the Romans.<sup>143</sup> And Harith is notably absent from John of Ephesus' first *Life of Jacob and Theodore*: John adds him as an important patron alongside the empress in his second account.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE* 10. 12 (tr. Hamilton and Brooks, 314).

<sup>144</sup> *Lives* (ed. Brooks, 3. 153) (Life 50).

Perhaps the significance of Jacob's missions for the Jafnids, and their importance as patrons, was only gradually visible to commentators living away from the unfolding events. As we saw in the different accounts of the martyrdoms at Najran, such joint initiatives as the missions of Jacob Baradeus might be presented in different ways by different protagonists, especially after Miaphysitism within the cities of the empire became increasingly dislocated and the divisions between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites ever more entrenched by time.

The missionary church created by Jacob, while united in respect for his charisma as a founder-figure, was fissile because of the difficulty in enforcing authority. And, importantly, after the deaths of Theodora and Theodore, Harith was the only political figure left who had been involved in the ordination of Jacob and the creation of a 'Jacobite' church that seemed to owe its survival to this event. Even if Jacob's missions had been intended to cement Christianity amongst Arab federates or to provide a ministry for a Miaphysite laity that was not yet beyond the pale, the deaths of Miaphysite patrons in the political centre left the Jafnid phylarch as the movement's most politically powerful patron.

Harith's role, as the holder of political influence in Constantinople and among his own followers, and as a patron of Jacob,<sup>145</sup> gave him and his successor an important role as the Miaphysite church splintered in the 550s–80s. The *Letter to the Archimandrites of Arabia*, written by Severan Miaphysites in connection with Harith's 563 visit to Constantinople and his condemnation of Jacob's lieutenants Conon and Eugenius as Tritheite heretics, admonishes the clergy against this heresy and records the help of Harith 'the faithful and glorious patrician' in bringing the Severans' subscription of faith to the Tritheites. The letter asks the Tritheites not to separate themselves from communion, though they, 'immersed in error', denied this opportunity.<sup>146</sup> Here we see Harith being praised as a patrician, the rank he had been granted by the emperor<sup>147</sup> and displaying his

<sup>145</sup> For Harith's personal contacts with Jacob and his disciple Paul see his *Letter to Jacob*.

<sup>146</sup> *Letter to the Archimandrites* (ed. Chabot, 205–6). The activities of the Tritheites are described in John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 5. 1–12 (ed. Brooks, 253–62), though he does not mention Harith.

<sup>147</sup> On Harith's rank see Shahid, *BASIC* 288–97.

patronage of Severan monasteries,<sup>148</sup> while the Severans in turn accept his right to adjudicate ecclesiastical affairs and to condemn their enemies as heretics. Though imperial intervention in Miaphysite affairs would continue, the Jafnid phylarchs would become increasingly powerful figures within Miaphysite ecclesiastical politics, able to judge and reconcile as the emperor had done.

The same tendency becomes more apparent under his successful son, al-Mundhir. John of Ephesus describes the schism between Jacob and Paul, which divided both settled Miaphysites and the Arab tribes, in which Mundhir ‘an active and zealous man (ἄριστος ἄνθρωπος)’ tried to reconcile the two parties.<sup>149</sup> After Jacob’s death, Mundhir achieved greater success. John notes that only the Arabs ‘pursued moderation in the debate’ since they revered both Jacob and Paul and the camp of the Ghassanids provided the only location where the two sides could meet and where, for a time, Paulites and Jacobites had shared communion. John describes Mundhir as especially aggrieved at this schism, ‘by which they were a cause of reproach to their neighbours [the Chalcedonians]’ and, in 580, travelled to the capital at the invitation of Tiberius to resolve the issue. After Mundhir was honoured with presents and military titles for his sons, he convened a synod in which the different sides promised to maintain unity.<sup>150</sup>

Mundhir’s intercession was ultimately unsuccessful, and it was attempted at the request of the emperor. But this does not dilute the esteem he is accorded in John’s history: his role as an ecclesiastical adjudicator gives him a greater prestige than any other lay figure in the fourth book of John’s history. His importance causes John to avoid the ecclesiastical historian’s traditional focus on the emperor, which he had followed in the previous three volumes. For a time the phylarch dominates the narrative as a potential unifier of the Miaphysites and a champion of their needs.

<sup>148</sup> See the lists of monasteries subscribing to the *Letter of the Archimandrites* (ed. Chabot, 213) headed by Tura d’Hartha, a probable foundation of Harith’s in the Golan. See E. Honigmann, *Evêques*, 162.

<sup>149</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 21 (ed. Brooks, 208).

<sup>150</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 39–40 (ed. Brooks, 172–5).

John never removes the Roman emperor from his history or stops presenting Miaphysitism as the empire's orthodoxy in waiting. But, in spite of his prestige, John was a lone negotiator for unity between the Paulites, the Jacobites, and the Alexandrians. I suspect that his ideals, especially his presentation of a unified Miaphysite history, were those of the previous generation. The splintering of different Miaphysite groups made the Ghassanids, at least in greater Syria, the most obvious source of adjudication or patronage, in the absence of a widely recognised or wealthy patriarch or sympathetic emperor. In this disjointed political context John grants the Ghassanids, like the Axumites, some of the portfolio of a Roman emperor when he praises Mundhir's role as an adjudicator and supporter of the Miaphysites (thus Mundhir, not Tiberius, is credited with causing persecution to cease in 580).<sup>151</sup>

### The Fall of Mundhir in John of Ephesus

This sympathy for Mundhir is extended to John's accounts of squabbles between Roman officials and the phylarch. John describes how Mundhir had defeated the Lakhmid invasion of 570 and how his requests for a reward were met by an assassination attempt. Following this he resumes his alliance at Rusafa. His subsequent capture of Hira and his foundation of new churches are contrasted with the fall of Dara and the madness of Justin II: for John, the Persians found their most active opponent in Mundhir.<sup>152</sup> Like Z'ura before Justinian, the barbarian's abilities and self-control are contrasted with the inability of the emperor. And the image of Mundhir as 'a trusting and loyal servant', that so influenced Shahid, derives from John's account of the phylarch's capture, in which he is 'shut in a cage like a lion of the wilderness'. While Mundhir is a captive in Sicily, his sons 'plunder all Syria and Arabia' and blockade Bostra. The *dux* of Bostra 'despised (سبوا) them as Arabs and marshalled his forces (جند) against them, but was slain'.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>151</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 42 (ed. Brooks, 176–7).

<sup>152</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 4. 3–7, 16 (ed. Brooks, 280–300 and 312).

<sup>153</sup> John of Ephesus, *HE* 3. 3. 40–3. (ed. Brooks, 174–8).

John's sympathies for Mundhir as a patron of the Miaphysites led him to extend the positive appraisals of the Arabs that we found in the fifth century accounts. But where Cyril of Scythopolis had praised the transformation of Ishmaelites into Saracens, John turns his portrayal against the Romans, contrasting his rational, loyal Arabs with the irrational and deceitful Romans who are allied with them. Still, there is no suggestion that the Ghassanids represent an *independent* political power: they are loyal subjects of the emperors, whose efforts for the unity of the church still take place in Constantinople and whose violence is justified by the deceit of the Romans.

An even more extreme comparison between the Ghassanids and their Roman allies is excerpted by Michael the Syrian from the otherwise unknown Miaphysite author Cyrus of Batna. He reports how Harith bar Gabala received the Chalcedonian patriarch Ephraem of Antioch at his camp. Harith refuses to take Chalcedonian communion saying: 'I am a barbarian and a soldier and I cannot read the scriptures but will not eat pure meat infected by the body of a rat.' After Ephraem concurs, Harith concludes: 'That rat is the Tome of Leo.'<sup>154</sup> Finally Harith orders a meal of camel flesh to be brought in. When Ephraem recoils, the phylarch remarks that Chalcedonian communion is as objectionable to him as camel flesh is to the patriarch.<sup>155</sup>

In Theodoret's *Life of Symeon the Stylite* camel flesh was used as a boundary marker: the hagiographer asserted that Arabs could change their diet to make themselves acceptable to the settled Christian world.<sup>156</sup> By contrast, Cyrus' Arabs need make no attempt to adapt to the norms of the settled world. In terms of diet, others must accept the Arabs as they come. This in itself reflects the Arabs' growing prestige, but it is accompanied by a superior position for Harith as a Miaphysite champion, whose disgust at Chalcedonian communion is the key to the anecdote. Like John, Cyrus develops earlier notions of Christianity as the religion of the barbarians to develop the Jafnid

<sup>154</sup> The Tome of Leo was an intensely Chalcedonian text produced by Pope Leo I, which remained a major stumbling block for Miaphysites. See Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 212–13 and 217.

<sup>155</sup> Michael the Syrian, 9. 29 (ed. Chabot, 310–11).

<sup>156</sup> HR 26. 13 (ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 190).

phylarchs into leaders of the true orthodoxy and to assert their customs and capabilities as being distinct from, but not inferior to, those of the Romans.

However, the cultural relativism that John and Cyrus wield is a polemical representation of events that reflects the symbiosis between the Jafnids and the Miaphysites. The suspicion that we see in Procopius, Theophylact Simocatta or Evagrius of the intentions of the phylarchs Harith and Mundhir may reflect the prejudice of settled peoples at some level, but it is clear that several hagiographers and ecclesiastical historians of the fifth century had been prepared to find good in the Arabs. John Moschos' *Pratum Spirituale*, written during the final war with Sasanian Persia and after Nu'man's forces had ravaged Palestine, presents the Arabs as lustful and violent. Even if individual Arabs are Christian, Christianity does not reform their behaviour: they are suitable forms for the Devil to assume and the objects of demonic possession, which is a symptom of their lack of self-control.<sup>157</sup> Antipathy towards the Ghassanids reflects their success as opportunists, whether in war, where their priorities might be personal feuds or booty, or in religion, where older Chalcedonian alliances with more minor phylarchs were replaced by a single Miaphysite super-phylarch. For those historians who were influenced by ancient Herodotean stereotypes, drew their information from the Roman regular army or wrote from a Chalcedonian perspective, such opportunism did indeed make the Ghassanids unreliable allies, and their complaints are testimonies to their increasing military and ecclesiastical independence.

Perhaps the most important indication of the importance of Miaphysitism in the independent action of the Ghassanids is the actions of Maurice against Miaphysites on the Arab frontier. The emperor made conversion to Chalcedon the criterion for Mundhir's son al-Nu'man to inherit his father's phylarchate. Nu'man's reply, that his people would kill him if he did so, illustrates the importance of Miaphysitism had acquired by this stage in the self-identity of the Jafnids, as well as its importance for their sponsorship of a

<sup>157</sup> John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, 133, 136, 155, 160 (tr. Wortley, 109, 112, 129 and 132).

semi-independent church.<sup>158</sup> After the dissolution of much of the Ghassanid confederation, Maurice used the peace with Persia in the 590s to challenge the importance of Miaphysitism among the Christian peoples that bordered the Roman empire, amongst the peoples of the Caucasus and amongst the Arabs, where 'many monasteries, fortresses, villages, and tribes were brought into the church of God'.<sup>159</sup> These Chalcedonian missions reflect the increased political importance of Miaphysitism amongst these border peoples and the success of these missions amongst the Arabs, after the exile of al-Nu'man, may illustrate, in part, the importance of the Ghassanids in giving the movement what unity it retained.

### Conclusions

For the fifth century, Obolensky's model might have been persuasive. Here Christianisation seems to have been tied up with allegiance to Rome and opposition to Persia. But this situation changed with the appearance of Nestorianism and Miaphysitism as serious alternatives to Constantinople's orthodoxy. A missionary Miaphysite movement, increasingly alienated from the Roman empire and harbouring a distinctive political thought that questioned the authority of the emperors, was prepared to seek the protection and support of non-Roman polities. These polities used Miaphysitism as a way to control their clients and maintain their prestige regarding Rome, while ensuring their independence from Roman ecclesiastical control. In the Ghassanid example especially, the use of Miaphysitism provides another example the phylarchs' opportunism, appropriating part of the prestige of the emperor himself. This behaviour was serious enough to prompt an imperial backlash in the 590s.

The existence of these external patrons may have spared Syrian Miaphysites the fate of Miaphysite sees in Anatolia, which gradually withered away. But the spread of the movement beyond the empire

<sup>158</sup> Michael the Syrian, 10. 19 (ed. Chabot, 374).

<sup>159</sup> R. W. Thompson, 'The Armenians in the fifth and sixth centuries', in Cameron, Ward-Perkins and Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History XIV*, 662–77, at 674–6; Evagrius, *HE* 6. 22 (eds. Bidez and Parmentier, 238).



was accompanied by problems of ecclesiastical authority, as multiple lines of episcopal succession proliferated. In this environment, figures such as John of Ephesus would continue to emphasise that all of the missionary endeavours of Severan Miaphysites, going back to those of Simeon beth Arsham, were part of the shared inheritance of this community of true Christians. The stories of missions, martyrdoms, and the support of non-Roman kings that he combines develop the theme of the Christian empire that had been found in earlier ecclesiastical historians. He presents what had once been signs of Roman informal empire into signs of a Miaphysite commonwealth, where different states and peoples all shared in the Christian narrative that had first been established for the Roman empire. For John, Miaphysitism never ceased to be an orthodoxy in waiting for the Roman empire, and the Roman empire remains the most powerful important force in his history, for whom the Ghassanids are loyal and mistreated subordinate allies. But the expansion of the Miaphysite movement led him to emphasise the unity of the regions they had proselytised and to allow the rulers of these regions a role in the provision of Christian leadership.

## Conclusions

In the sixth century, the eastern Roman empire was, in some senses, at the height of its powers. Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, with their long histories of Hellenic culture and urbanism, were becoming ever more populous and prosperous. The architectural projects of Justinian projected an image of imperial power from Sinai to the Balkans. The military conquest of much of the West gave the empire considerable potential to project influence in the barbarian kingdoms that remained in Gaul and Spain. And the orthodox Christianity of the state was given ever greater importance, in terms of the legal definition of 'being Roman' and in terms of the abilities of emperors and bishops to interfere in the practices, beliefs and hagiographic histories of their citizens. In short, Christianity provided a mandate for conquest, an architectural language of power, and a set of supra-ethnic symbols with which orthodox Romans could identify.

However, as we have seen, the crystallisation of the equation between being Christian and being Roman, and the attempts of the state to control this centripetal process, had its casualties. In Chapter 3 we briefly examined the effects of Christianisation upon a Hellenised Jewish community. The discrimination of the state against Jews, and its wish to clearly delineate the boundaries between Christianity and Judaism, lent power to a rabbinic movement that claimed to speak on behalf of true Judaism. And if the recognition of rabbis was a response to Christian aggression and the need for the community's internal self-governance and cohesion, then an important side-effect was to demarcate Hellenic culture from Jewish culture, in a way that had not occurred in c.100–350. It is in this context that representational art in synagogues was

finally removed by the end of the sixth century, obeying a long-standing rabbinic prohibition. And, similarly, the growth of rabbinic influence may underlie the debates over the use of Greek or Hebrew in diaspora synagogues, and the final victory of Hebrew. So, while Justinian demanded that the Torah be read in Greek, 'so that the people could understand', the exclusion of Jews from Greek education (or the privileges of political involvement) and the importance of rabbinic schools teaching in Hebrew displaced Greek as a language of high culture and removed the attractive lure of Constantinople and its mandarins.<sup>1</sup> In deepening the association between being Christian and being Roman, emperors also alienated those who did not fit into their new religious system from the older symbols of Roman identity and the hierarchies of patronage that came with them.

I suggest that there are some similarities between the Jewish case and that of the Syrian Miaphysites. For both, cultural independence was controlled by religious leaders, who, benefiting from the end of political and cultural opportunities bound up with the *paideia*, Greek language and imperial office, annexed older marks of distinction in language and custom and prevented 'good Jews' or 'good [Miaphysite] Christians' from crossing these boundaries. In both cases, a complex identity was formed that drew upon a series of pre-existent, latent characteristics.

The difference is that Edessa and other Syriac-speaking territories originally employed their cultural independence within the Roman empire, and only gradually evolved into a more radical political thought, which emphasised the conditional nature of imperial authority and the displacement of the emperor's roles onto local holy men, the embodiments of local 'orthodox' practice, or non-Roman rulers. And, even then, Syriac writers would still reflect on a history when emperors had once listened to their concerns and aided 'the orthodox' and might hope for such a time to return.

In the city of Edessa and the lands converted by its missionaries, the Syriac language represented a prestige dialect of Aramaic, able to

<sup>1</sup> N. De Lange, 'Jews in Justinian's empire', in Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 405–22; N. De Lange, 'The revival of the Hebrew language in the third century', in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996), 342–58.

challenge Greek as a language for religion and act as a vehicle for a shared Christian Suryaya identity that stretched from the Roman empire to Sasanian Mesopotamia. In the *Doctrina Addai*, which we examined in Chapter 4, we saw how Edessene aristocrats could mould Edessa's self-awareness as a Christian city to bolster their own positions as guardians of orthodoxy, to exclude Jews or pagans from the city's history, and to establish Edessa as a great city of the Christian Roman empire. Essentially, the city's pre-Constantinian history gave the *bnay hire* the opportunity to elaborate and invent myths that would establish Edessa against cities that had been important in the pagan past. Edessa's cultural independence was used to the city's advantage within the Roman empire in the fifth century. The *Doctrina Addai* participates in debates about orthodoxy and correct Christian government that bound the empire together, while using king Abgar's contacts with the church in Persia or with pre-Constantinian Christianity.

However, one of the characteristic features of the late antique empire was its centralisation of power onto a few centres, especially Constantinople. The creation of a new aristocracy of service in Constantine's capital and the erosion of civic lands in the provinces, alongside the removal of the rights to make local law or issue coins in provincial cities, underlay both the so-called 'flight of the curials' and the extension of the tax regime. This administrative pattern also has a religious and ecclesiological analogue: the relics of different local saints were gathered in Constantinople in the fifth and sixth centuries and the patriarch of the city gradually asserted his primacy over all of his fellows. This ecclesiological centralisation altered the balance of power between the sees: emperors in the era after Chalcedon were much more likely to seek the support of Constantinopolitan Chalcedonians first and the rest of the empire second. The emperor's ability to adjudicate doctrinal disagreements was increasingly biased towards Constantinople under the vulnerable successors to Theodosius II, to the detriment of the imperial relationship with the sees of Alexandria or Antioch, and those, such as Edessa, that followed their Christology.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the solidarity with a Christian Roman empire,

<sup>2</sup> See P. Blaudeau, *Alexandrie et Constantinople, 451–491: de l'histoire à la géo-ecclesiologie* (Rome, 2006), esp. 400–31.

which Liebeschuetz perceives in Malalas, transcended the importance of his home city: the centralisation of the empire onto Constantinople caused the evaporation of older ways of asserting civic prestige in the provinces.<sup>3</sup>

For Mesopotamia, its cultural independence had fuelled its participation within Roman Christianity. A sense of a distinctive orthodox history had allowed Edessa to celebrate its independent kings and eastern missions while participating in wider debates about Christian government. But, as we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, when emperors disregarded the opinions of the Miaphysite leaders of Mesopotamian cities such as Edessa, Amida, and Tella, these leaders could invoke their region's history of orthodoxy and their cultural independence to question imperial authority and to make it clear that the persecuted and ascetic Miaphysites represented the real inheritors of the orthodox saints of the past.

Simultaneously, persecution led to the exclusion of Miaphysites from education in Greek and from participation in imperial patronage. The situation was never as extreme as that of the Jews. But there was a gradual association between the Syriac language and Miaphysitism, which we see in Philoxenus' attempts to turn Syriac into a rigorous language for philosophical debate and in the Chalcedonians' reaction, which promoted Christian Palestinian Aramaic as a prestige dialect for Chalcedonian Aramaic-speakers in the Transjordan.<sup>4</sup> In asserting this connection between Syriac and Miaphysitism, or in seeing Miaphysitism as the fulfilment of the orthodox history of Mesopotamia, texts such as the *Julian Romance* or John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* prepared the ground for self-perception of the thirteenth-century Suryaye, preserved in the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian, as a people defined by their religion and language who were totally independent from the heretical kings of the Greeks who had once oppressed them. To be a Suryaya, within the Roman empire at least, increasingly meant being Miaphysite.

<sup>3</sup> W. Liebeschuetz, 'Malalas on Antioch', in *Antioche. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique. Topoi* supp. 5 (Lyons, 2004), 143–53.

<sup>4</sup> De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 112 and S. P. Brock, 'Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique', *OCA* 221 (1983), 1–14 at 10–13; A. Desreumaux, 'La naissance d'une nouvelle écriture araméenne à l'époque byzantine', *Semitica* 37 (1987), 95–107.

But it is important to recognise that the attitude of Michael the Syrian, while it grew out of the political thought of the late sixth century, cannot be projected back into late antiquity. Geoffrey de Ste Croix's impression of a Miaphysite Syria that stood idly by while the Arabs invaded does have a grain of truth. Sixth century Miaphysite thinkers did emphasise the emperor's loss of his mandate as a successor to Constantine and offered a mandate for rule to Rome's Christian allies in Axum or among the Arabs that gave them greater political leverage against Rome. And this threat was significant enough to prompt Maurice to make a specific issue of the Miaphysitism of one opportunistic Arab rebel. But it is only a grain: the sixth-century sources De Ste Croix used are all filtered through Michael the Syrian's later compilation, and must be balanced against the image of Miaphysitism as the empire's 'orthodoxy in waiting' that we find in John of Ephesus.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, even if non-Roman kings could employ Miaphysite Christianity to forestall Roman interference, Christianity itself was still more associated with the Roman empire than any other state and it was hard for any of Rome's rivals to intrude upon her Christian claims for universal rule. Before over-exaggerating the centrifugal aspects of Miaphysitism and seeing a direct connection to the separatism of Michael the Syrian, we should remember how Heraclius sliced the Gordian knot of doctrinal debate and confessional boundaries with his defeat of the Persians, his forced conversion of the Jews, and his restoration of the True Cross. By, this, coupled with his willingness for doctrinal compromise, he temporarily healed the rifts between Christological confessions, when the Nestorian *catholicos*, the patriarch of Alexandria, and the emperor all agreed to share communion.

Instead of keeping the Arab conquests in sight as 'the end of late antiquity', and judging affiliation with Rome by the willingness of communities to collaborate or oppose the Arabs,<sup>6</sup> we must recognise

<sup>5</sup> G. De Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient world: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London, 1981), 484–5. Michael the Syrian is one of the subjects of a project on Suryaya identity at Leiden University in the forthcoming work of J. Van Ginkel.

<sup>6</sup> W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge, 1992), 30 notes the lack of evidence for Miaphysite aid to the Arabs.

that the evolution of a Syrian Miaphysite identity was significant in other ways that extended far beyond the seventh century. The experiences of the Miaphysites in the sixth century, which led them to displace the authority of Roman emperors, the physical displacement of their own leaders into more peripheral parts of Syria and Mesopotamia, and their evangelisation of the eastern borders of the empire, may have given them a greater political and cultural self-sufficiency under Islamic rule than the 'Melkites'. The authority given to bishops and holy men in Miaphysite hagiography was confirmed by a century long incubation, in which the Sufyanid Jazira was left ungoverned by states and where the influence of bishops and monasteries had few rivals when they set out communal boundaries in religious terms.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the broad imagined community of Miaphysite congregations that is appealed to by John of Ephesus, and remembered by Michael the Syrian, gave a unity to a Miaphysite diaspora<sup>8</sup> that continued to employ Syriac as a liturgical language, which was still bolstered by the cultural production of Edessa under Arab rule.

The literary production of Edessa, or major monasteries such as Qenneshre, was not exclusively religious: both were centres for the translation of Greek secular works. In this sense they were better examples of the continuation of late antique academic traditions than Anatolia, Palestine, or Iraq. But this academic prestige, that would later underlie the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic and send Edessene scholars to Baghdad, was fuelled by a Syriac-speaking, Christian educational system that was controlled by the clergy. By the Abbasid period, the Arab conquests had brought greater political independence, opportunities and, Conrad has suggested, prosperity<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> For the political background see C. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: the Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, 2000), 50–62 and 169.

<sup>8</sup> This diaspora included the Arab tribes converted in the late sixth century, who retained an autonomous identity as Christian tribes until the eighth century. See Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *HE* 90 (tr. Palmer, 171) for the Banu Tanukh and Kaegi, *Islamic Conquests*, 173 on the Banu Taghlib.

<sup>9</sup> J. Watt, 'A portrait of John bar Aphthonia, founder of Qenneshre', in J. Watt and J.-W. Drijvers (eds.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority* (Leiden, 1999), 155–68 at 156 and

Even so, in the century following the Arab conquests, the Miaphysites might still view the Roman emperor as their best hope for salvation from Arab taxation or religious oppression. Christianity's history remained bound up with the Roman empire, which at various occasions in the seventh century looked set to regain its lost provinces during Arab fitna. The Pseudo-Methodius in the 690s combines several strands of earlier Miaphysite writing, using motifs from the *Cave of Treasures* and the *Julian Romance*, in which the last emperor, like Jovian, crowns the Cross at Golgotha. The influences upon the text show the continued importance of a model for imperial rule that was created during the efflorescence of cultural independence and political thought in the Syriac-speaking world that could transcend confessional boundaries and provide answers to the political problems of the day. Interestingly, the apocalypse even goes to great lengths to equate the king of Cush with the Roman emperor, showing that the memory of the king of Axum as a protector of the Christians of Najran had to be woven into the global political vision of the apocalypse after the eclipse of Axum herself. The defeat of the Romans by the Arabs is a proof of the wickedness of earlier emperors, but, like the *Julian Romance*, the apocalypse anticipates the appearance of a future orthodox ruler, who would then drive back the Arabs. Thus, if the apocalypse shows both the longevity of hopes for a Roman reconquest on one hand, it also shows how Syriac texts, composed or copied across the lands of the Miaphysite diaspora, represented a shared discourse in which distinctive expectations for Christian rule could be expressed.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, while the cultural independence of fifth-century Mesopotamia could be turned against the emperor and fuel a culturally self-sufficient Miaphysite community under Roman and then

L. Conrad, 'Varietas syriaca: secular and scientific culture in the Christian communities of Syria after the Arab conquests', in Reinink and Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan*, 85–105.

<sup>10</sup> Reinink, 'pseudo-Methodius', though S. Brock, 'Syrian views of an emergent Islam', reprinted in idem, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1994), VIII at 19 argues for a Chalcedonian provenance. This seems unlikely given its references to other Miaphysite texts, its composition in the Sinjar and its subsequent circulation in Syriac.



Arab rule, the retreat of the Suryaye from Rome, in terms of their cultural connections and their attitudes to the emperor, was a much more drawn-out process that takes us far beyond the end of antiquity.

## *Abbreviations*

AB	Analecta Bollandiana
ANF	A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writing of the Fathers down to A.D. 325</i> (Edinburgh, 1867)
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BF	Byzantinische Forschungen
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
CJ	Codex Justinianus
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CTh	Codex Theodosianus
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
GCS	Griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhundert
HE	Historia Ecclesiastica
HR	Historia Religiosa
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JESHO	Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JNov	Justinian, Novellae
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LM	Le Muséon
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
OLP	Orientalia Lovanensia Periodica
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PLRE	J. Martindale (ed.), <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman empire</i> , Part II, 395–526 (Cambridge, 1980); Part III, 526–640, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1992)
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
ROC	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien

SC	Sources chrétiennes
SEERI	Saint Ephraem Ecumenical Research Institute
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der deutsche Morgenland Gesellschaft

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## Index

- Abgar V, 1, 17, 29, 77, 83, 85–95,  
101–16, 123–7, 131, 140–3, 156,  
187–8, 219–20, 259
- Abgar Legend* 83, 85–6, 88–9, 94, 101,  
111–5, 126, 141, 159
- Acta Arethae* 216, 222–3, 225
- Acts of Habib, Shmouna and Guria* 97,  
99
- Acts of Mar Mari* 81–2, 86,  
110–7, 124
- Acts of Sharbil and Barsamya* 100, 143
- Addai see Missions
- Alexander Akoimetos 46, 59–60
- Amida 9, 11, 19, 68, 141, 161, 166–7,  
178–9, 181–4, 186–9, 202–4, 208,  
260
- Ammianus 26, 28, 230, 232
- Anderson 14, 215, 219–20, 223
- Angels 63–4, 136
- Antioch 7, 9, 17, 19, 27, 38, 47–8, 56–8,  
60, 64, 74, 80, 90, 92, 106, 116, 134,  
137, 144–5, 153–4, 156, 159, 161,  
165 n. 1, 171, 173, 175, 179, 183,  
193, 202, 225, 259–60
- Apamea 38, 49, 64, 168
- Arabs 35, 63, 91, 93, 230–57  
near Edessa, 159, 209–10, 212, 215,  
224
- Aramaic dialects 9–10, 75–80  
as ‘barbaric’ 39, 41, 44  
as ‘king of the languages’, 122  
in Palestine, 208
- Arbela 113, 119
- Archives 9, 86–7, 126
- Arianism 26, 44, 46, 49, 245
- Armenia 13, 35, 104, 127, 132, 153, 168,  
176, 179, 214–5
- Armenian language, 7, 10, 46,  
127, 132
- Assyria 46, 90–1, 108, 111–8, 127
- Assyrians (Old Testament) 14, 151, 156,  
196, 198
- Athens 2–3, 11, 194
- Axum 209–30, 252, 261, 263
- Babel 31, 122–3
- Bardaisan 29, 36–7, 76, 86,  
228
- Barsauma of Samosata 105–7
- Beirut 9–11, 174, 201
- Beroea 10, 38, 50
- Bishops 5–7  
as servants of the emperor, 31–2,  
97–100, 257  
education of bishops, 173  
idealised bishops, 45–7, 50, 84  
itinerant bishops, 168–9, 183,  
227, 246  
episcopal succession, 92  
as traitors, 189, 204
- Bnay Hire* 94–100, 143
- Bnay Qyama* 50–5, 91, 114, 121, 125,  
186, 207
- Book of the Himyarites* 221–3, 225
- Bostra 235–9, 249, 252
- Bourdieu 3
- Brown, Peter 5
- Cameron, Averil 7
- Cave of Treasures* 117–25, 149, 153,  
180, 263
- Cenobitic monasticism 47–9, 52–3, 59,  
61, 185–6
- Chain of succession 44–50, 194–8, 202–5
- Chalcedonian 18–9, 66, 133, 148,  
161–208, 222
- Chalcis 10, 38, 48, 59, 75, 242
- Christian Palestinian Aramaic 78,  
208
- Christian race 29–32, 36–7
- Christianisation 32–7, 78–81, 205–8
- Christianity as a barbarian  
religion 39–45, 59–60, 213–4,  
225–6

- Christology  
   Dyophysite 38, 45–6, 92, 113–5, 161, 182, 187  
   Miaphysite 89, 92, 95, 105, 114, 157–255  
 Church of the East 10, 44, 110–24, 229, 232, 245  
 Civilization, 28–34, 39–44, 192–5  
 Clothing 48, 196–7  
 Commonwealth 209–15, 216–30, 249–55  
 Constantine 7–8, 24, 134–5  
   foundation of cities, 11  
   conversion and effects, 23, 31–2  
   letter to the Persians, 33, 137  
   memory of Constantine, 47, 85, 88, 105, 108, 132–61, 214–5  
 Ctesiphon 113–7  
*Cure of Hellenic Maladies* 36, 41–2  
 Cyril of Alexandria 46, 83, 89, 92, 95, 105, 115, 118, 228  
 Cyril of Scythopolis 182, 194, 233, 238, 246, 253,  
 Cyrrhus 10, 45, 47, 59  
 Cyrus of Batna 253  
  
 Damascus 179, 243  
*Diatessaron* 41, 54, 56, 65, 79, 83–4, 90, 92, 95  
 Diet 23, 40, 147, 253  
 Diffusion of Syriac 77–81  
 Diptychs 164, 173  
 Disrespect for ascetics 184–5  
 Doctrina Addai 82–110, 142–50, 153, 156, 178, 187, 259  
   dating 82–8  
   diffusion 101–31  
 Edessa 77–162, 188–9, 218–20, 228–9, 242, 259–62  
   invulnerability 88, 95, 104, 142, 156, 181  
   scholarship 77–80  
   missionary 78–80, 111  
   pilgrimage 79, 86–9  
   martyr cults 97–100  
   in Syriac historiography 126–7  
   as bride of Christ 138, 151  
   Edessenes 77–162, 178, 186–8  
     defined by language 95–101, 121–4  
     defined by religious practice 88–95  
   Egypt 38, 41, 48, 118, 164, 166–7, 173–4, 201, 202–5, 221  
   Endogamy 70, 73, 95–100  
   Ephraem the great 45–7, 51, 53, 181–2  
     on the Jews 55  
     on the Messalians 57  
     as a Palutian 92  
     influence on the *Julian Romance* 151–2, 158  
   Epiphanius of Salamis 24, 148  
   Eremiticism 47, 49, 53, 185, 195–8, 202–9  
   Ethnie 13–6, 69–70, 71–81  
   Ethnography 4, 28–9, 177, 192–3  
   *Eudaimonia* 34, 61, 207  
   Eusebius of Caesarea 21–4, 29–30, 84–9, 199, 206, 227  
   Eusebius of Rome, 134–6, 141, 143–4  
   Evangelism see Missions  
   Exile (of Miaphysites) 167–8  
   Expansion of empire 32–7, 222–3, 232–5, 255–6  
  
 Female asceticism 61, 64  
 Fortification 238–9  
  
 Gaza 64, 174, 179  
 Georgia 7, 46, 172  
 Gerizim 73  
 Ghassanids 169, 172, 212–5, 230–56  
 Gindaris 63  
 Goths 12, 70, 98–100, 176, 227, 231  
 Greek attitudes to, 2–3, 32, 79, 84  
   translations into, 104  
   translations from, 79, 84, 86  
  
 Hanan the tabularius 85, 87–8  
 Haram 237–8  
 Harith bar Gabala 230, 241–50, 253  
 Harran 8, 76, 95, 116, 126–7, 138–40, 143, 151–2  
 Hatra 36, 76–8, 91  
*Helena Legend* 104–5, 107  
 Hellenistic period 9, 76, 127

- Heresiology 6–7, 38, 85, 149, 177, 192, 197  
 Heteropraxy 44–9, 52–64, 184, 204–5  
 Himyar 35, 212, 215–27  
 Hira 215–8, 227, 231, 236, 244, 252  
*Historia Religiosa* 38–65, 192–3  
 Historical amnesia 75, 83, 156  
*History of Karka de Beth Slouq* 115–6, 119  
 Hobsbawm 8, 12–3, 73  
  
 Ihidayuta 185–6, 206  
 Imagined community 133, 215, 219, 262  
 Improvement (settlement) 28–36, 206–8  
 Iraq 110–124, 262  
 Irrationality 22–6, 32, 40, 64, 68–9, 144, 147–8, 177, 193, 204, 214  
  
 Jabiya 216, 225–6, 236  
*Jabiya Letter* 225–6  
 Jacob Baradaeus 169, 175, 180–1, 212–3 and Harith bar Jabala, 247–50  
 Jacob of Nisibis 45–8, 50, 66  
 Jerusalem 4, 101, 168, 182, 195, 214, 247 and Edessa, 104–8 burial place of Adam, 120 restoration of the Temple, 137–8, 146 in *Kebra Nagast*, 221  
 Jews 10, 19, 55, 71–3, 78, 174, 178, 257–8 anti-Judaism 24, 31–2, 49, 85, 89–90, 95, 101–10, 145–50, 151–62, 202–4, 217–22, 225  
 John of Ephesus 163–208, 226–30, 240, 248–9, 251  
 John of Tella 166, 168–9, 180, 190–1  
*Judas Kyriakos Legend* 105  
*Julian Romance* dating 140–2, 158–61  
 Julian as a pagan 143–5, 151–3 as irrational 144 as lustful 141, 144, 151 as a persecutor 134–9, 162 as a friend of the Jews 138–9, 146–7  
 Julianism 170, 173  
 Julian Saba 45–8, 53, 186  
 Justin II 170, 174–5, 211, 214, 243, 252  
 Justinian 35, 107, 121, 159–62, 168–70, 187, 191, 195, 196, 198, 200–1, 203  
 Juvenal of Jerusalem 214, 247  
  
 Kaiserkritik 159–62, 187–205  
 Kavad 1, 141, 147, 158–9  
*Kebra Nagast* 221–3  
 Kirkuk 115–6, 119  
  
 Lakhmid 215–6, 223, 232, 234, 240–5  
*Letter of the Jews to Marcian*, 162  
*Life of Euphemia* 95–100  
*Life of Porphyry* 64  
*Logos* 23, 197, 199  
 Lydda 71  
  
 Mabbug 91, 175  
 Manichaeism 30, 49, 51, 78, 84, 94, 111, 143, 211, 228  
 Manual labour 40, 53, 60–2, 204–6  
 Marcionites 47, 50, 64, 80, 84, 94, 143  
 Masruq 216–8, 224  
 Materialism 136, 180, 186, 203–4  
 Maurice 165, 172, 244, 254–5, 261  
 Maypherkat 11, 179  
 Messalian 49–52, 56–61, 205–6  
 Missions 29, 33–5, 52, 78–83, 110–7, 154 by Addai 85–6, 91–4, 127  
 Miaphysite missions 169–75, 180, 183, 210–5, 228–30 missions against the Miaphysites 255  
 Mundhir 172, 212–3, 224, 230, 239, 242–4, 251–4  
 Mythic foundation 9–11  
  
 Nationalism 12–6, 69–70, 219–20, 223–5  
 Natural slave/ Slavishness 3, 22, 33–4, 62, 233, 235  
 Nazirites 55–6, 121, 184  
 Nicaea 6, 16, 31, 44, 68  
 Nimrod 117–9, 125–7  
 Nisibis 8–9, 46, 55, 79–80, 116, 137, 139, 142, 153–4, 158–9, 242, 243  
 Nod 117–9, 124

- Novatians 6, 30–1, 169, 249  
 Nubia 169, 210–2, 216, 222
- Old Testament parallels, 24, 51, 55,  
 63–4, 75, 117–25, 148–51, 181, 235  
 Orthodoxy 5–6, 12, 19, 25–8, 44–51,  
 91–4, 156–7, 175–80, 213, 228
- Paideia* 2–5, 11, 24–5, 36, 43–4, 148, 258  
 Palestine 10, 71–4, 77, 79, 84, 102–3,  
 105, 108, 164, 167, 182, 194, 197,  
 208, 218, 245–9  
 Palmyra 8, 59–60, 75–7, 81, 93  
 Parrhesia 191–8  
 Paul of Samosata 165  
 Pentecost 13, 31–2, 68, 91, 102, 123  
 Persecution  
   of Jews 74, 95, 127, 147–9  
   of pagans 95, 171  
   of Christians 83, 112, 133–6, 158,  
   167–72  
 Persians 8–10, 46, 77, 107, 139–42,  
 158–60, 212, 215–7, 236–9  
   shahs 1, 34, 74, 239  
   Christians 32–5, 40, 43–4, 48, 126,  
   142, 153–4, 234  
   as irrational 25, 30, 144, 194  
 Pharan 248–9  
 Phoenicia Maritima (Roman province)  
 166, 168  
 Philoxenus of Mabbug 51, 58, 162, 165,  
 180, 245, 260  
 Prayer 57, 59, 61  
   for victory 20, 25, 181, 234  
*Protonike Legend* 89, 98, 101–10, 125,  
 145, 150, 162  
 Providence 61–2  
 Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite 1, 91, 141–3,  
 158–9  
 Pseudo-Methodius 227, 263
- Qenneshre 262  
 Qu'ran 243
- Rabbis 72–5, 225, 257–8  
 Rabbula 43, 54–6, 59, 65, 84, 92,  
 102, 184  
 Ramla 216, 224  
 Roman law 10, 23, 36–7, 64–5, 70–2,  
 98–102, 107, 177, 191–4, 201–2
- Rome 134–6, 153–6  
 Rusafa 235–9
- Sacred homeland 117–21, 142–57,  
 178–83, 215–30  
 Safaitic 230–1  
 Samaritans 30, 73–4, 137, 142, 144–5,  
 211–4, 240  
 Sasanians see Persians  
 Self-control 21–8, 39–44, 59–65,  
 191–8  
 Sepphoris 71  
 Severus of Antioch 18, 66, 161–2,  
 165–70, 174–5, 201–2  
 Shapur II 115, 137–9, 160, 214, 222  
 Signification 15, 71, 95  
 Sinai 248–9  
 Socrates Scholasticus 23–36, 144, 199  
 Sozomen 78, 81, 104, 144, 199  
 Stereotype 3–5, 21–8, 39–44  
 Stylite 35, 58, 62–6, 106  
 Suleiman 69–70  
 Suryaya 71, 81–3, 123–5, 127, 132–3,  
 179, 181, 188, 259–60  
 Symeon the Stylite 34–5, 62–6, 106,  
 188, 196  
 Synagogue 72–5, 102, 146, 202, 225,  
 257–8  
 Synesius of Cyrene 22, 40  
 Syria I (Roman province) 8–10, 17, 81,  
 166, 174, 182  
 Syria II (Roman province) 47, 81,  
 166, 182  
 Syriac 7–9, 17, 29–30, 41, 45,  
 Syriac Christianity 17, 55, 75–81,  
 82–124, 180–1, 182, 212–3, 218–20,  
 226–7, 258–60  
 Syriac epigraphy 75–8, 243
- Tatian 39–44, also see *Diatessaron*  
 Tella 9, 107, 260  
 Theodora 168–71, 176, 189, 196, 210,  
 246, 249–50  
 Theodoret 36–66, 192–3, 214, 253  
 Theodosius of Alexandria 168–70  
 Theodosius II 24–8, 106–7  
 Thomas the apostle 54, 85, 111, 212,  
 218–9  
 Tiberias 71, 137, 145, 217–8, 225,  
 Tiberius II 172, 211, 244, 251–2

- Trade 9–10, 114, 159, 202–3, 216, 231,  
238–9, 242
- Trajan 36–7
- Tritheites 170, 173, 210, 250
- Umayyad period 239
- Visions 64–5
- Zachariah of Mytilene 73, 165, 174–5,  
194, 197, 201, 213–4, 226, 249
- Zoroastrianism 119, 121, 124, 153,  
190–1, 229